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## SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS;

OR,

### A PRACTICAL IMPROVEMENT

OF THE

#### PRINCIPAL HISTORIES IN THE

## Old and New Testament.

IN FIVE VOLUMES.

#### BY THOMAS ROBINSON, M. A.

VICAR OF ST. MARY'S, LEICESTER; AND LATE FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

#### A NEW EDITION;

WITH A BIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHOR, INCLUDING MR. HALL'S SPLENDID ELEGY ON HIS CHARACTER.

#### VOL. IV.

Search the Scriptures. John v. 39.

All these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition.

1 Cor. x. 11.

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THE HISTORY OF LESUS CHRIST.

Printed by Thomas Davison, Whitefriars, London.

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### SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS.

VOLUME THE FOURTH.

CONTAINING

THE HISTORY OF JESUS CHRIST.

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Sect. 41.

### SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS.

#### JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 14.

Jesus replied to the objections of the Pharisees against his disciples for plucking the ears of corn, and vindicated himself for healing the withered hand on the sabbath-day—performed various cures—spent a whole night in prayer—chose twelve apostles—and repeated certain passages of his sermon on the mount.

The history of Jesus exhibits the highest excellence of character, labouring under the most malignant misrepresentations, contempt, and opposition. His life was one continued series of actions denoting fervent zeal for God, and pure benevolence to man. We might have thought that such exalted goodness could not meet with enemies, or would soon disarm their malice. But it was otherwise; and the fact incontestably proves the extreme depravity of human nature. While this depravity remains, a conduct like that of Jesus will always excite disgust. Let it, however, be our only care to tread in the steps of our Lord and Saviour, regardless of all temporal inconveniences which may follow. A wicked world may hate and defame the truly religious; but He, whom they serve, will soon plead their cause, and even now "Wisdom is justified of her children \*."

Various objections were urged against Jesus; for he was surrounded by perverse and malevolent persons, who watched him with close attention, and sought occasions to accuse and reproach him. Very frequently, therefore, he had to stand upon the defensive, and reply to the petulant cavils of his adversaries. A common subject of complaint was, that he did not pay a proper regard to the sabbath; because he ceased not from acts of kindness and mercy on that day. The proud and superstitious Pharisees, who placed all their religion in external observances, endeavoured to represent him as a profane despiser of divine institutions; yet the case was, that he neglected no ordinance of God, but did not conform to their fanciful and traditional explanations of the law.

His disciples accompanied him on his return from Jerusalem, soon after the passover, and, as they walked through the fields, finding the calls of hunger, they began to pluck the ears of the corn, which grew about their path \*. The dictates of necessity, however, were no apology to the insidious attention and watchful malice of their enemies. It happened to be the sabbath; and immediately the objection was ready, "Behold, they do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath-day." The thing itself was expressly allowed †; but the particular time, and perhaps some concomitant circumstances of the action, gave the offence. It might be that the very rubbing of the ears of corn was represented as a kind of labour unsuitable to that sacred season.

Our Lord, who will maintain the cause of his people against their accusers, replied to the charge, and vindicated the conduct of his disciples by the example of David. That holy man, in a case of pressing necessity, took the show-bread out of the house of God on the sabbath, for the support of himself and his attendants; an action, which in any other situation would have been highly sinful. To save

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xii. 1—8. Mark ii. 23—28. Luke vi. 1—5. + Deut. xxiii. 25.

life is more pleasing to God than the observance of any merely positive institutions; for, as Jesus argued, our gracious God has declared that "he will have mercy and not sacrifice \*;" that is, when they interfere with each other, the former must have the preference, and the latter be dispensed with. From this part of the defence we are led to remark and admire the faithful and zealous attachment of his followers, who cheerfully exposed themselves to hunger, that they might wait upon him, and enjoy the benefit of his divine instructions. We are not aware how many and extreme difficulties they endured; and, probably, we should not have known their distress on this occasion, had it not been requisite to offer an excuse for them. But where do we now perceive such a regard to Jesus as disposes men to suffer in his service? In general, many with draw upon the first appearance of hardships, and "walk no more with him." Like birds of passage, they abide not the winter, but depart when storms approach.

Our Lord alleged, likewise, that, as the priests were allowed to perform certain laborious offices on the sabbath, in their attendance upon God, so his disciples might be permitted to do that which was necessary to enable them to wait upon Him. To make this reason good, he asserted his own sovereign authority, declaring that "the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath-day." The important truth demands our serious consideration. The appointment itself, of one day in seven to be dedicated to holy purposes, is derived from the Lord Christ. He instituted it at the creation, when he rested from all his works; He renewed it at the delivery of the law from Mount Sinai; and He, who ordained, has a right to suspend, to modify, or alter it, as he pleases. It was,

<sup>&</sup>quot; Hos. vi. 6.

therefore, a sufficient vindication of his followers, in the circumstances now mentioned, that they acted in

his service, and by his permission.

It becomes us, also, to regard "the Son of man" as "the Lord of the sabbath." In this view, we should observe that sacred season out of obedience to his command, and seek the enjoyment of his presence and favour, as its grand object. We believe it to have been agreeable to his will, if not by his express directions, that a change should be introduced, and that the first, instead of the last, day of the week should be kept holy to Him. This is now distinguished by a new and more honourable name. "the Lord's day:" He claims it as his own, in a peculiar manner, and has laid us under fresh and greater obligations to sanctify it, by rising from the dead, and blessing his church with the miraculous effusions of his Spirit, on that very day. In this alteration it is not implied that the sabbath itself is abrogated, or that any thing is taken away essential to the original institution, which prescribes such a portion of our time to be set apart for God. But rather, according to this representation, if Jesus be "the Lord of the sabbath," the appointment is confirmed, and its continuance among Christians ordained by him.

Soon after the incident last mentioned, we find him combating the same or similar objections. "On another sabbath," probably in some city of Galilee, he attended the public worship of God at the synagogue, as his custom was; and there also he took the opportunity of teaching the people\*. Here again we are instructed to be thankful that we have a house of prayer, to which we can resort, and that divine ordinances are administered among ourselves, much more valuable than those which Jesus fre-

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xii. 9-21. Mark iii. 1-12. Luke vi. 6-11.

quented. But how are we followers of Him, if our place be generally vacant, if by our absence we show that we care not for the sacred service?

In the midst of the congregation sat a poor man, whose right hand was withered, and, therefore, utterly disabled for labour. From the known benevolence of Jesus, and his former miraculous cures, the Pharisees expected that he would hear the cripple, and narrowly observed him for that very purpose, that they might charge him with a direct profanation of the sabbath. He was aware of the perverse reasonings and malicious intentions of their hearts, which they had not expressed; yet he was not discouraged. He therefore called forth the man, whom he had beheld with compassionate regard; and then they asked with some subtlety, that they might insnare him by the question, whether it would not be a violation of the holy rest to perform any cures on that day. He replied, however, that all exertions of real mercy were perfectly allowable, and that they must be strangely inconsistent to extend relief, as they commonly did on their sabbaths, even to their sheep in danger or distress, and yet obstinately refuse it to one of their own species. This was not all; He knew that they entertained a secret design of murdering him, while they objected to his works of kindness. Accordingly, by a solemn appeal to their consciences, he detected their hypocrisy, and confounded their malevolent purposes. He called upon them to say, whether it was more suitable to the object of that sacred season " to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it:" and instantly they were convicted and silenced. He felt a holy indignation and grief, on account of the obduracy of their hearts: and, looking round about upon them all, that he might command their attention, he spake the word with an inexpressible majesty, and the cure was performed.

Did they not, then, relinquish their opposition to him, when they saw such an incontestable proof of his divine power? Did they not all acknowledge, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God?" Ah! the desperate wickedness of man! We can scarcely conceive greater depravity than that which is here exhibited: they departed in a rage, and immediately consulted together how they might destroy him. Being apprized of his danger, he retired to the sea of Galilee: and there, not discouraged by the designs of his enemies, he continued to prosecute his important work. Immense multitudes from various and distant parts of Judea followed him; and many amongst them, oppressed with divers diseases, experienced the virtue of his healing hand. But, to avoid all appearance of ostentation, and that he might not still further incense his opposers, he took particular pains to prevent the accounts from being dispersed abroad. Thus, by his kind attention to the weak and distressed, and his gentle unassuming deportment, he fulfilled the prophetical description of his character given by Isaiah, and proved himself to be the very Saviour that should come.

We may learn prudence and modesty from our great Exemplar; and he will instruct us, also, to persevere in well-doing, whoever may set themselves to resist, or form malevolent intentions against us. But let us fear the awful state and condemnation of his adversaries. How vain and detestable are their schemes! Their best-concerted plans will be baffled, and themselves covered with their own confusion. Yet, we apprehend, disaffection to Christ prevails among ourselves, as certainly as it did with the Pharisees of old: and it is requisite for us all to inquire, if we are not, in one respect or another, actuated by a similar spirit. What, then, will the issue be? What can you expect in prosecuting a contest against

<sup>&</sup>quot; Isa, xlii. 1-4.

Him, who has all power in his hands? O "kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little \*!"

It should seem, that, even in our own times, some unfair and mischievous conclusions have been drawn from our Lord's conduct upon the sabbath, and his vindication of himself. Many think themselves authorized to pursue their worldly projects of business and pleasure. But is there any thing in what he has said or done to countenance such a practice? Do we perceive in him any contempt of the sacred day? Or can we infer more from his example than this, that works of piety, charity, and necessity, may be attended to? We ask, then, Are these the only calls which you regard on the season set apart for holy rest? Have you not taken pains to explain away all obligations to a strict and serious observance of the sabbath; as if, at least, the Gospel had so far released you from them, that every man is now at liberty to prosecute his own plans, as he is led by interest or convenience, by fashion or inclination? You may inveigh against superstition; but are you not, in this way, pleading for profaneness? We are aware that infidels are desirous to throw down that strong barrier of religion, the sanctification of every seventh day; this being effected, there is nothing to prevent the floods of impiety and wickedness from overflowing and desolating the world. Should we not, then, on our part, make a bold stand against every such attack, and maintain the important duty of devoting to the Lord, without abatement, that portion of our time which he requires? And can we help lamenting that so many, who profess to be followers of Jesus, habitually neglect and shamefully violate the duty? We see them deserting the house and ministry of God, ready to join in every scheme of idleness, vanity, and dissipation, or

<sup>•</sup> Psal. ii. 12.

else so engrossed with secular cares, that their thoughts and affections cannot be raised to any higher objects; and yet they wish to be complimented as good Christians. How strange and grievous an in-

consistency is this!

The same ardent zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of men continued to actuate the Saviour through each part of his life. Intending to appoint certain persons, out of his constant attendants, to the Apostleship, he previously retired for secret prayer to a mountain, where probably an oratory was erected \*, that he might engage the divine bless-ing upon the institution; and so fervent was his devotion, that he remained all night in the same spiritual exercise †. A whole night spent in importunate supplications to God! Ah! at how great a distance do we stand from this eminent example! Would not a single hour, so employed, seem a weariness to us? Yet surely we must allow the propriety and necessity of consecrating some portions of our time to the same pious purpose. Especially, when our minds are fixed upon any important scheme or undertaking, a more than common length of holy retirement, and an unusual earnestness in prayer, will be requisite, that we may proceed with right principles, and prevail with our God to assist and prosper us. And can there be a business of greater moment than the ordination of persons for the sacred ministry?

After such a preparation, very early in the morning Jesus called together his disciples, or stated followers, who by their previous acquaintance with him had been in some measure trained up for the service; and out of them he chose "whom he would:" as Lord of his own kingdom, he appointed twelve, who were to act like chief officers, or principal mi-

Prid. Connect. vol. iv. p. 557.

<sup>†</sup> Mark iii. 13-19. Luke vi. 12-49

nisters, under him. These he named Apostles, that is, messengers, intending, after further instructions, to send them forth with full powers and credentials to declare his will and publish his Gospel throughout the world. He might, probably, fix upon this exact number, from its answering to the number of the tribes of Israel, that, as the Jewish church was derived from the twelve sons of Jacob, so the Christian might be founded and established by means of twelve persons, as the heads and fathers of it. We rejoice and give thanks for the benefit of their labours, which extends even to us; for through them the salvation of God has been made known to distant lands and successive generations; and the truth of their doctrine is confirmed with a strength of evidence, which no assaults of our adversaries can shake.

The office of the Apostleship was extraordinary, and therefore not designed to be perpetual; but there is a general and constant necessity for the common functions of the ministry, which, accordingly, will be continued to the end of time. Let prayer be made without ceasing unto Christ, who himself directs all the affairs of his spiritual government, that he would raise up and ordain faithful pastors and teachers, and support and prosper them for the conversion of sinners, and the edifying of his saints. If He give the word, great will be the company of preachers; and those who go forth at his call, and by his appointment, may be expected to labour to good effect. It seems especially requisite for them to be previously acquainted with Jesus, and furnished with their instructions from him, that they may be able to say, as he did, "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." Yet even such persons, who are properly invested with the sacred character, stand in need of the constant intercessions of the church, that, by the divine blessing, they

may " both save themselves, and those that hear them."

When the Apostles had received their commission, Jssus came down with them into the plain; and he was immediately surrounded, as usual, with vast multitudes imploring relief. At his command their various diseases were expelled, and the causes of their distress removed. So freely and extensively did he manifest his power and compassion, that none solicited his help in vain; " for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all." We wonder not that those who are oppressed with affliction, supplicate deliverance. In general, men feel an acute sense of their bodily wants, and importunately beseech others to assist them. But sin hath induced a dreadful stupor upon our souls; in consequence of which few perceive or lament their spiritual necessities, or consent to apply for that remedy, which Jesus alone can bestow. O, flock around him, you who are bowed down with a conviction of your guilt and depravity, and who know from your own painful experience that you "are wretched, and misera-ble, and poor, and blind, and naked!" Come, and he will supply all your need. Let your faith bring you to him; and the influence of his grace shall work effectually in you, to cure your spiritual maladies, (for virtue still goes out of him), and you shall be able to bear witness of his mighty energy, even as the multitudes who were now around him.

Nor were the doctrines of Jesus less salutary than nis miracles. When he descended from the mountain with the Apostles whom he had lately chosen, and a numerous assembly of other persons resorted to him, he took the opportunity of delivering the most important instructions and exhortations both to his particular attendants and to the people at large. His address upon this occasion contains a repetition of certain remarkable passages of the sermon which

he had preached some months before, probably in a distant place, and to a different audience. As that sermon has been already considered, it may be sufficient briefly to suggest the principal topics on which our Lord insisted at this time; not as if they were of small moment, but because they have so lately en-

gaged our serious meditation.

With a view to encourage his true disciples, and perhaps those more especially whom he had just ap-pointed to the sacred function, "he lifted up his eyes on them," as if rejoicing over them, and ex-pressing for them his peculiar affection. He then described their character, their exalted privileges and happiness, notwithstanding all they might suffer, and, with the language of authority as well as love, pronounced them blessed. This is perfectly applicable to his sincere followers in every age. They are "poor," it may be, in worldly things, as they certainly are "in spirit;" but they are the favoured subjects of Christ's kingdom; and heaven, with all its bliss and glory, shall be their inheritance. They may suffer the extremity of want, so as to be destitute of food, for the sake of the Gospel, after the blessings of which they, "hunger," more than for their necessary support; but they shall be supplied with every thing truly good, and satisfied with all spiritual enjoyments. They may endure much distress upon earth, oppressed with penitential sorrow, no less than with the calamities of life; but the time of their deliverance and exultation is at hand. They may be treated with hatred and contempt, and separated from the society of their nearest friends; but on this very account they ought to rejoice and triumph, because the Lord God hath conferred an honour upon them, and will distinguish them with marks of peculiar regard, at the resurrection of the just.

But, turning to others of an opposite character, he

described their awful case, and denounced the most tremendous woes against them. Let those in the present day, who are destitute of true religion, hear their doom declared, and fear for themselves. They perceive not their need of any spiritual blessings, nor feel any ardent desires to obtain the grace revealed in the Gospel. Whatever temporal advantages, therefore, or sensual pleasures, they may now enjoy, they are wretched, since they "have neither part nor lot in this matter." Possibly they may abound in wealth, and be able to command every gratification which a carnal heart may covet; they may live in splendour, gaiety, and dissipation; they may be admired and applauded amongst men: but the day of their calamity is coming; for their expiring breath will conclude all their comfort and their glory; nor can any thing await them beyond the grave, except tribulation and anguish, shame, and everlasting contempt.

After such alarming declarations, Jesus proceeded to deliver various precepts, which prove the peculiar holiness of his religion, and arc of general use to all his professed disciples, for the regulation of their tem-

pers and conduct.

He enjoined the exercise of forgiveness and love towards the most violent and malignant persecutors; together with the practice of universal and disinterested benevolence. But to return kindness for injuries, blessings for curses, how opposite is it to the pride, envy, anger, and resentment, of our fallen nature! To do good, without the prospect of present recompense or advantage, and without exception of persons, how contrary to the selfish contracted notions of men! Yet only by such enlarged beneficence can we prove ourselves to be partakers of the grace of Christ, and the children of the Highest, who extends his benefits to all.

He gave cautions about judging and reproving

others. There are cases, in which it may be proper and necessary to undertake that unpleasant office: but we should be sure that the occasion demands it, and that we do it not rashly or severely, or from an arrogant, censorious, or malicious disposition. Upon this head our Lord intimated the danger of following "blind guides;" and, as we are generally much influenced by our teachers, we should beware lest we attach ourselves to those who do not feel or understand the mild and liberal spirit of Christianity. Yet, while we look to others, we should not forget ourselves, but rather begin the work of reformation there; for, except we perceive, condemn, and correct our own faults, we are incompetent to decide upon the characters and conduct of others.

He enforced the necessity of proving a professed regard to him by a holy life. As the fruit determines the nature of a tree, so the habitual tendency of our actions, words, and tempers, will best discover the state of our hearts towards him. By such marks, then, we must examine whether we are truly united to Christ, and renewed by his grace. To what purpose shall we make a show of high respect for him, while we live in an uniform course of disobedience? How striking his reproof, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Such compliments he considers as the grossest insult; yet how generally has that insult been put upon him! Not a few in every age have pretended the most ardent affection, and have been forward to give him every proper title expressive of honour, who have not submitted to his authority. Let us beware of this fatal delusion.

He represented the difference between the sincere believer and the unsound professor of the Gospel. They differ most widely from each other, both in their present practice, and in their final condition. The sincere believer comes to Christ, receives with an humble mind the doctrines of grace, and, by an exemplary life, proves that the word which he has heard has produced its right influence upon him. His trust is built on an immoveable basis: "the Rock of ages" is the sure foundation on which he rests. Trials and temptations, like heavy storms, may beat upon him; but nothing shall be able to overthrow his hope, or disappoint his expectation. The hypocrite may listen to, and perhaps zealously contend for, the pure system of the Gospel; but he advances no further. He depends on his accurate notions and distinctions, or his compliance with the forms and ceremonies of religion, while he feels not its inward energy. He will, therefore, be left defenceless and unsupported in the day of his calamity: "the overflowing shower" of divine indignation shall suddenly cast him down, and sweep him away into everlasting destruction.

Such were the solemn admonitions of the Saviour. They have been offered to our notice before; but surely we may bear the repetition of them again and again. They are at all times interesting, seasonable, and necessary. May they lead us to a strict and impartial examination of our own hearts! What, then, is our character? what our expectation beyond the grave? If we call ourselves the disciples of Jesus, what is the regard we pay him? Do we give him any thing more than a bare compliment? Or are our affections and general habits regulated by an unfeigned obedience to his will? What benefit do we derive from hearing the Gospel? Or what fruits of righteousness do we produce? These important inquiries naturally arise from the subject before us; and they claim our most serious consideration. Let us examine the foundation on which our edifice rests, since we are building for eternity. How terrible will be the confusion of the ungodly, when "the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow their hiding-place \*!" But may we, "being rooted and grounded in the love of Christ," stand fast in the faith against every assault on earth, and then appear at the last awful day with confidence and exceeding joy, through the merits and mediation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! Amen.

<sup>•</sup> Isa. xxviii 17.

#### JESUS CHRIST.

#### SECT. 15.

Jesus healed a centurion's servant—raised a widow's son to life—testified of John the Baptist—lamented over the impenitent—encouraged the contrite—dined with a Pharisee, and vindicated the woman, who stood as a mourning penitent at his feet.

Amongst the various incidents which meet us in the life of Jesus, none will be found of a trifling or uninteresting nature. Every thing in this history is extraordinary, and replete with instruction. Each step that we advance will furnish us with fresh proofs of his divine character and mission, and at the same time with renewed instances of his condescending and compassionate regard to our miserable and guilty race. May every view of him constrain us to cry out with admiration and gratitude, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us \*!"

After the solemn address which Jesus delivered to his disciples in the audience of the people, he retired to Capernaum, his most usual residence+. Wherever he went, opportunities of exerting his benevolence were offered, and these he readily embraced. In this city, a man of good reputation, who, it should seem, attended the worship of the true God, a centurion, or a captain in the Roman army, having heard of Jesus, of his character, and the miracles he had wrought, applied to him to come and heal a favourite servant at the point of death. The Gentile

<sup>•</sup> Luke i. 68, 69. + Matt. viii. 5-13. Luke vii. 1-10.

soldier discovered a remarkable degree of humility and faith. Thinking himself unworthy to solicit the kind notice of so exalted a Personage, he prevailed on some of the principal Jews in the place to present and second his petition. Jesus, who was ever inclined to succour the afflicted, immediately consented to comply with their request. But the centurion, ashamed to give him the trouble, and conceiving it to be an unsuitable thing that he, a sinner and a Gentile, should receive such a Visitant in his house, believing also that Jesus was able to perform the cure at a distance, sent another deputa-tion of his friends, and then at last went forth himself to meet him, entreating him to proceed no further, but only by his powerful word to command the health of the servant to be restored. "Even I," said he, "who am subject to the authority of another, yet, as I have soldiers under my control, no sooner issue out my orders than they are executed." More was implied than expressed; and the inference intended could be no other than this, "How much rather will every injunction of thine be instantly obeyed, since all creatures are subservient to thy will! No remoteness of place can be any obstacle to prevent the desired cure, if Thou shalt so ordain."

This was a signal instance of faith, in a stranger to the commonwealth of Israel. It was such, that our Lord declared his admiration, being superior to what he had yet found among the Jews themselves. And hence he took occasion to warn them, who boasted of their descent from Abraham, that many from the most distant parts of the earth, even of Gentile extraction, should obtain a distinguished rank in the kingdom of glory, whilst those, who presumed upon their exclusive right to it, should be condemned to a state of everlasting torment and despair. This conveys a suitable admonition to us. We observe that there is no situation or condition of

life, however unfavourable, in which the grace of God may not produce eminent instances of real religion. And it should excite our thankfulness to meet with any one, under great disadvantages of education and in the midst of many snares, like this officer in the Roman army, humbled with a deep conviction of extreme unworthiness, and entertaining high and honourable thoughts of Jesus. He did not stoop too low when he said, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof;" for the most exalted monarch in the world might properly adopt the same confession. And shall we not remember and acknowledge that we deserve no tokens of the Saviour's kind regard, and that, if he deign to visit us. it must be ascribed to his own wonderful condescension and mercy? But do we possess the faith of the centurion? Or, do we not, rather, distrust the power of Christ? We are favoured, not above the Gentiles only, but even more than the ancient Jews; so that we may be called "the children of the kingdom." Yet have we not occasion to fear that many, who are destitute of our privileges, may rise up in judgment to condemn us? And would it not aggravate our misery to see them admitted into heaven, whilst we ourselves are excluded for ever?

The request of the centurion was granted, and his confidence in Jesus proved to be well founded. He was dismissed in peace, and his servant instantly restored to the full vigour of health, merely by the efficacious word of the great Physician. Nor will any be finally disappointed of their hope in Him. We should entertain large expectations, from a persuasion of his ability to save; and, by a strong unshaken faith in him, we shall infallibly secure his blessing to our souls.

After this miracle, it is probable that the fame of Jesus was celebrated still further, and that, in consequence, the number of his followers increased. The

multitude, indeed, so pressed upon him, that he had no leisure to take proper refreshment: and so incessant was his attention to them, that his friends interfered, blaming him for an excess of zeal, and with much vehemence importuning him to desist from his labours, as injurious to himself, and even denoting a degree of insanity\*. Peculiar occasions may justify and demand such ardent exertions as to some may appear needless and extravagant. Nay, the very fervency, which at all times becomes the servant of Christ, will be accounted by the world a sure mark of weakness or derangement of the faculties. But, compared with the vigorous efforts of the Saviour, the most eager and strenuous endeavours of his people will seem to savour of lukewarmness and sloth. Indeed, we are not capable of activity like His.

He might so far yield to the solicitations of his friends, as to receive some nourishment, and then retire for the night; but the next day he returned to his work again t. He took a journey of several miles, to the city Nain, accompanied by many attendants; and there a fresh opportunity offered for the display of his high character. As he approached the place, a most affecting spectacle was presented. He met the solemn procession of a funeral; a distressed mother, who had been before bereaved of her husband, was now following her only son, her chief support and comfort, to the grave. As a man, our Lord felt the tenderest compassion for the afflicted widow, and, without any request from her or from others, interposed, on the mournful occasion, to wipe away her tears. But what consolation could he administer to one who seemed to have lost her all? "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" He showed himself stronger than death; for instantly, with divine majesty and authority as the Almighty Lord, "who quickeneth whom he will," he spake the word, and the dead

<sup>\*</sup> Mark iii. 20, 21. + Luke vii. 11-17.

revived. He restored to the disconsolate woman her beloved child, in all the vigour of life; and thus "gave unto her, beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

What an astonishing exhibition both of mercy and of might! We are at a loss to know which of them we should most admire. No wonder that an event so uncommon, and incontestably miraculous, impressed the minds of all the spectators with a serious awe, and constrained them to acknowledge that an illustrious Prophet had risen up among them, and that God had again visited his people. And shall not we, also, be struck with holy fear and reverence of the Saviour, while we contemplate his actions? Does not the occurrence before us clearly prove his divine mission? Why, then, do not all receive him, as coming from heaven to instruct and redeem his church? Alas! but few are convinced; or general convictions are very superficial. Many will not examine the evidence with serious attention, but, in proud or careless contempt, turn away both their eyes and their ears from the truth. Others, we observe with grief, though obliged by the strength of argument to assent to the Gospel, yet fail of that un-feigned and supreme regard which is due to Jesus. They may feel an impression of terror upon their minds, like the inhabitants of Nain, and confess that "a great Prophet has risen up," while they refuse to submit or listen to the doctrines which he delivers. How strange and fatal an inconsistency is this!

We have seen the tenderness of Jesus towards the poor widow: surely we shall learn, from the example, to look upon the afflicted with kindness and compassion, and stretch out our hands for their relief. But feeble, in comparison, is our pity; for, in many cases, our endeavours to remove or mitigate distress are ineffectual. Jesus alone can administer suitable and adequate assistance. O, fix your attention upon Him,

you that are overwhelmed with trouble, whose "tears have been your meat day and night!" He can instantly turn your weeping into joy, and your complaints into loud thanksgivings, by accomplishing deliverance in a way which to you may seem impossible. For what cannot his power effect? Or, what will not his love be disposed to grant, if really expedient for you? Death, indeed, may rob you of those who were the delight of your eyes and the desire of your hearts, and the grave may detain them; yet, under the pressure of this calamity, you are taught to rejoice in Jesus, as "the Resurrection and the Life," who will shortly break up the mansions of the dead, and restore to you every dear friend, who has departed in the faith, clothed with glory and immortality, to rejoice with you in his blissful presence for ever.

The report of our Lord's miracles, which was disseminated far and wide, was carried by the disciples of John to their honoured master, then in prison\*. For their conviction, we suppose, rather than his own, the Baptist took that opportunity of sending them with an express message to Jesus, inquiring whether he were the very Messiah or not. In reply to their question, He condescended to give them the most satisfactory evidence, which might disperse every doubt, and probably induce them to attach themselves to Him, after John's decease. They beheld the wonderful exertions of his power and mercy; for in their presence, while they stood before him, he healed all manner of infirmities, cast out devils, and restored sight to the blind. He referred them, therefore, to his works, for a decisive proof of his character, and directed them to carry a faithful relation to John of what they had seen and heard, that they might all perceive the ancient prophecies, concerning the Saviour of the world, to be

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xi. 2, &c. Luke vii. 18-35.

fulfilled in him. At the same time he added, that it would be happy for them if they should not be staggered in their minds, or influenced by the prevailing prejudices and objections against him. It is of importance to ourselves, also, to be assured that Jesus is no deceiver, that he exhibited the strongest testimonies of his divine mission, and, therefore, that our faith rests on a sure foundation. Yet many reject him: and it is allowed that there are such things relating to him, his doctrines, and adherents, as may give offence to superficial and captious observers, and such as proud and sensual minds can never relish. In this view, blessed indeed are they who have themselves escaped or surmounted these difficulties, and who are not led away by the exceptions of others.

Our Lord took occasion, from the visit of John's disciples, to address the multitude concerning the Baptist, who had once been extremely popular among them. He spake of him in the most honourable terms, as being steadfast both in his preaching and practice, not easily shaken like a reed with the wind, not seeking the pomps of the world or sensual gratifications, but as a man of singular austerity and self-denial. He declared him to be superior, in some respects, to all the ancient prophets, especially as being the harbinger of Messiah, and preparing the way for his reception. He remarked the peculiar ardour to which some had been excited by his ministry, who seemed as if they would gain an admission into the heavenly kingdom by a holy violence; and yet he lamented the awful condition of those who rejected both the Baptist, and the Saviour whom he came to introduce. He was led, therefore, to complain of the perverseness of that generation, who had discovered the most absurd prejudices against them, and who condemned the one and the other, though for different and opposite reasons; so

that there appeared no prospect of obtaining any acceptance with them. They had refused their attention to John, on account of his austerities, as if he were a melancholy distracted man, under the possession of an evil spirit: and now they calumniated Jesus for the freedom of his intercourse with men of all characters, as if he were himself addicted to intemperance, and a patron of the dissolute and abandoned. Yet the Saviour rejoiced, that, amidst these various misrepresentations, there were those who perceived and approved the wisdom of their conduct.

The application to ourselves is obvious. Many, in our own day, betray a frowardness and malignity of temper similar to that of the ancient Pharisees. They are ever ready to take exceptions to the people and the ways of God, and that too on contrary grounds. The ministers of Christ, endued with different talents and dispositions, address them sometimes with one mode of exhortation, and sometimes with another; being solicitous to recommend the Gospel to their favourable regard by every method they can devise. But every method proves equally unsuccessful; for now they are thought too rigid and morose, and again they are condemned for allowing too great a latitude of conduct. It were, therefore, vain for them, with the utmost prudence and circumspection, to expect to gain general esteem, or avoid reproach. Happy they, who are earnestly concerned to save their own souls, and are pressing, with a holy violence, into the kingdom of heaven! They perceive the propriety and necessity of many things in religion, with which others are disgusted; and, instead of being carried away with the torrent of general prejudice, they determine to adhere to the truth and service of God, however vilified in the most opprobrious terms.

On the occasion just mentioned, Jesus was induced

to speak more largely, and with peculiar ardour of affection, while he lamented over the impenitent cities of Galilee, in which he had performed most of his mighty works. The meek and compassionate Saviour denounced one we upon another against Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, and predicted the final and aggravated ruin which was coming upon them for their obduracy and contempt of the Gospel. Many, it should seem, of respectable character and abilities, remained in unbelief. This very circumstance has been thought an objection to the Christian faith. But surely, in this view, it appears that it was not a mere human system, or indebted to worldly policy for its support. The ways of God are in the deep: but we perceive it to be His purpose to abase the pride and stain the glory of man; and when we observe that his salvation is hid from many of high attainments in literature, whilst it is revealed to some of inferior parts and mean rank in life, we are constrained to be silent in the dust, or rather, with the Saviour, to adore the sovereignty of the awful dispensation.

At the same time, however, to encourage those humble penitents, who, under a conviction of their guilt, might be ready to fear that the condemnation he had denounced would fall upon them, he represented his own supreme anthority, and divine perfections, commensurate to those of the Father, and then declared his peculiar tenderness and grace to such as might be bowed down with a sense of their sin and misery. He published the most kind and general invitation to all who felt a burdened conscience and sought deliverance, adding express and absolute assurances of pardon, peace, and salvation, on their unfeigned application and cordial submission to them.

We ask, then, What conceptions do you form of Jesus? what regard do you show him? Do objec-

tions arise in your minds, and prevent your cordial belief of the Gospel? But, after such proofs as have been adduced, who shall complain of the want of evidence? Have you no apprehensions of the tremendous consequences of rejecting him? Shall Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, be condemned with accumulated woes for their infidelity, and you escape unpunished? Or, do you consider yourselves as utterly excluded from his notice, and incapable of receiving mercy, on account of your extreme depravity and long continuance in sin? He speaks expressly to your case, and gives you direction and encouragement suited to your distress. O, keep not at a distance from Him, while he says, "Come unto me!" He will not disdain you, nor withhold his blessings from you. "He is meek, and lowly in heart," and therefore will condescend to your request, mean and worthless as you are. Only be willing, as teachable scholars, to take your instructions from him, and, as obedient servants, to fulfil his injunctions: you will not complain of the rigour of his demands, but experience them to be easy and delightful, and "find rest unto your souls."

Is it inquired, What was the consequence of our Lord's solemn addresses? Some might be deeply and properly affected, and others so much impressed as to be induced to show him an outward respect, without any cordial attachment. One person of this latter description, whose name was Simon, a Pharisee, invited him to dine at his house; and Jesus, who was an example of civility and kindness, and who sought opportunities of doing good in all places and among all characters, readily complied \*. During his visit there, a singular circumstance occurred, which showed the ignorance and pride of the Pharisee, and the amazing grace and compassion of the Saviour. A woman in the town, who had been a

\* Lake vii. 36-50.

notorious sinner, and, as it is supposed, infamous for her lewdness, heard where he was; and, probably emboldened by his assurances of mercy and peace to the mourning penitent, desired to give some testimony of her strong regard for him, and for that purpose prepared certain costly perfumes, with which she might anoint him. She was admitted into his presence, while he was at dinner; and standing behind him, as he lay reclined upon the couch, she betrayed marks of extreme distress. The cause of it, evidently, was unfeigned contrition for her sins. She wept; and her tears were so abundant, that the drops flowed down upon and bedewed the Saviour's feet. Perceiving where they fell, she stooped, and wiped them off with her dishevelled hair. Nor was this all: she could not refrain, even before the company, from expressions of ardent gratitude and love: she kissed his feet, and poured her rich ointment upon them, unmindful of its proper use, or not pre-

suming to apply it to his head.

These signs of her fervent affection our Lord did not disdain, but received them favourably. The Pharisee, however, who looked on her with contempt, took offence. Lifted up with a proud conceit of his own goodness, he considered the very touch of the woman as carrying defilement, and concluded that a Prophet of God must not only know the baseness of her character, but instantly turn away from her with disgust. This disposition is not uncommon. Those, who have high thoughts of themselves, set up a kind of claim to the Divine regard, and cannot bear that such as have been notorious offenders should be admitted to a share in that regard, or that any encouragement should be given to them, even when transformed and established "in newness of life." But how large is the grace, how great the condescension, of Jesus! He did not scorn the poor weeping penitent, though she had been most abandoned, and long enslaved in the service of Satan; but he received,

he comforted, he defended her, at the hazard of his

own reputation.

He replied, in a very apposite parable, to the secret objections of the Pharisees (for they had not been openly avowed), showing, that of two debtors, both of whom are insolvent, and both freely released from their obligations by their generous creditor, he to whom the largest forgiveness is extended will feel the warmest gratitude. He then referred immediately to the case of Simon and the woman, reproving him for the neglect of those tokens of respect which are usually paid to welcome visitants, and commending her for the expressions of her regard, however extravagant they might seem. The Pharisee thought his own offences few and trivial, and, therefore, could not entertain any high value for the Saviour; but she, who was overwhelmed with a deep sense of her aggravated guilt, and yet cheered with the hope of a full and gratuitous pardon, was solicitous to declare, in every way she could, the ardour of her affection towards Him, who had obtained the mercy for her. "Wherefore," said Jesus, "her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much." Her strong attachment to Christ did not procure her remission, but, rather, it was its fruit and evidence. It would invert the order of things, and of God's dispensations to his people, to suppose that this attachment preceded her acceptance; but it afforded a striking proof of it, and manifestly arose from a conviction of her vast obligations. Not, therefore, as if she were then first received to favour, but to establish her the more in thankfulness, hope, and joy, he solemnly pronounced her absolution: "Thy sins are forgiven." That very circumstance occasioned fresh offence among those who were present; for they had no just conceptions of the person and authority of Jesus. But, in order to declare his divine character most peremptorily, and to assert his high

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prerogative, however they might cavil, he repeated the assurance of her pardon and salvation, through faith in his name, and dismissed her in peace.

A serious attention to this little narrative may suggest the following inquiries, which will furnish an

useful improvement of the subject.

Are not we debtors to God, according to the description of the parable? Have we not failed of that obedience which He has a right to demand? Is not our debt large, immense beyond calculation? Let us beware of the ignorance and presumption of the Pharisee. Though others may seem to owe far more, will this procure our discharge? Or are there any, among the most atrocious offenders, whom we may disdain? Does it not, rather, become us to confess that our own transgressions are innumerable, and, considering how we have violated the strongest obligations to God, that none can need forgiveness more?

Are not we, likewise, insolvent? Or, in what manner shall we contrive to answer all the claims which the Lord God has upon us? What payment can we tender? Is it such as will be sufficient to satisfy his just demands? It is said, perhaps, "We shall repent, and do better." But shall we ever perform more than would have been due from us if we had not sinned? And, if we only prevent an increase of the debt in future, can this have any effect in diminishing what is already contracted, or wipe off any part of the old account against us? What, then, shall we resolve on? Let us not waste the time in forming vain and fruitless schemes of our own, but frankly acknowledge our inability, and go with deepest humiliation to that Jesus, who receiveth sinners."
Let each of us cry to Him, "O Lord, undertake for me:" He will appear as our Surety, and present us with a full and free discharge. If, like this penitent woman, we mourn and weep at his feet, he will observe our tears, commiserate our distress, and hasten

to comfort us with the assurance that "our sins,

which are many, are forgiven."

If, then, he pronounce us to be acquitted, what should hinder but that we depart in peace? This is his own gracious proposal, and ought not to be refused. Yet do not many reject the consolation, and indulge an excess of sorrow? Doubtless there is continual cause to abhor ourselves, and lament our folly; but to grieve as if there were no hope is to despise the mercy provided. Jesus, the compassionate Redeemer, stands ready to wipe away our tears, and bids us "Be of good cheer." Let us only, without reserve, submit to him, and depend upon him;

and then we may "go on our way rejoicing."

Finally, what affections do we feel towards Jesus? Surely the warmest expressions of thankfulness and zeal are highly suitable and becoming in those who have obtained such free and extensive forgiveness. Where Jesus is disregarded, we can assign the real cause; the malignity of sin is not understood, the greatness of the debt incurred is not at all apprehended, and it is supposed that there is but little, if any, need of remission. Do we, therefore, show any certain signs of sincere and ardent love to our heavenly Benefactor? Do we seek his presence, and delight to be in the house where Jesus is? Do we mourn before him; and are we willing to be at expense for his sake? We cannot, indeed, make any adequate compensation; but do not we wish to testify the sense which we feel of our immense obligations to him?--" O Lord, come, and shed abroad thy love in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, that we may hereby be constrained to dedicate ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto Thee, who hast loved us, and given thyself for us!" Amen.

## JESUS CHRIST.

#### SECT. 16.

Jesus took another circuit—healed a demoniac—vindicated that miracle against the objections of the Pharisees—udmonished and reproved them—and encouraged his faithful adherents.

THE grand Luminary, which visited the earth in the person of Jesus Christ, diffused its unequalled splendour through a large extent. Happy indeed would have been the men of that generation, if they had been sensible of their inestimable privilege, in having such an Inhabitant, such a Teacher, amongst them. He brought with him "good tidings of great joy to all people," and he laboured to disseminate the knowledge of them far and wide. He took one circuit after another, in the land of Judea, publishing salvation wherever he went, and among all ranks and characters. Not seeking the friendship of the great, or any sensual enjoyments, but ever intent upon his work, he removed from city to city, with considerable pain and fatigue to himself, for the benefit of others, that he might give them an opportunity of being instructed in the Gospel of his grace \*.

Where are they who copy after this illustrious Pattern? Though we are not called to travel in the same manner, we ought to possess the same spirit, and be willing to sacrifice our ease to usefulness. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." So shall "this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus †." A similar bene-

<sup>\*</sup> Luke viii. 1-3. + Phil. ii. 4, 5.

volence may be displayed even by persons of moderate abilities and private situations. According to our talents and occasions, we should lay ourselves out for the glory of God and the best interests of our fellow-creatures. Hereby we shall evince our acquaintance and union with him, whose name we bear, while "we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory,

by the spirit of the Lord."

Many, who resorted to him, soon withdrew from his company, having no relish for his conversation. But he had some stated attendants, throughout his various movements, who were almost inseparably attached to him. "The twelve were with him." These he selected as his chosen witnesses, that they might be instructed in the mysteries of his kingdom, confirmed in their regard, and fitted for their apostolic function. Certain pious women, also, who had been healed of their infirmities, and converted by his grace, occasionally, at least, waited on him, and "ministered unto him of their substance." What condescension, to receive such assistance! He became very poor indeed. Though "the earth is his, and the fulness thereof," so mean and destitute was his condition here, that he subsisted upon the charity of others. Shall we admire their liberality, in contributing to his support? Or rather shall we not envy them the honour of being permitted to do so? "It is more blessed to give than to receive \*." And may not this blessedness be ours? Though we cannot minister unto Jesus, in his person, we may in his representatives, in his distressed members; for, what is bestowed upon them he will consider as bestowed upon himself. And, if we "shut up our bowels of compassion from them, how dwelleth the love of God in us +?"

Thus attended, then, Jesus took another circuit, in which we shall meet with some remarkable occur-

<sup>\*</sup> Acts xx. 35.

rences. In the course of his progress, a poor unhappy man, under the possession of the devil, so grievously afflicted as to be deprived both of his sight and speech, was brought to him, and obtained immediate relief \*. According to his custom, he paid a gracious regard to the application, by expelling the evil spirit, and restoring the demoniac to the perfect exercise of his faculties. And what effect did the miracle produce? The common people were struck with astonishment, and ready to draw the conclusion that Jesus must be the promised Messiah. But were not these persons ignorant, and liable to be imposed on? That they were unlettered, it is allowed; yet that circumstance was no disadvantage to them in the present case; they were as capable of judging of plain facts as the acutest philosophers. The Scribes and Pharisees, conceited of their wisdom, like most pretenders to science, possessed more pride, and therefore more prejudice, than the multitude: and thus, whatever evidence the Saviour exhibited, they constantly urged one objection or another, and would not be convinced. How malignant and impious a disposition did they discover in the instance before us! They suspected, if they did not avow their sentiments, that Jesus performed the miracle by the assistance of Satan, and really acted in confederacy with the prince of darkness, to promote his interest in the world. How infamous and absurd the inference! Was there any ground, in his life, his doctrines, or his works, to accuse him as an agent or accomplice of the devil? No: very far otherwise indeed. But it is not uncommon for men who hate the Gospel to give a credit and importance to such insinuations against it, as appear, upon the very face of them, ridiculous and false.

This circumstance, however, rendered the charac-

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xii. 22-32. Mark iii. 22-30. Luke xi. 14-23.

ter of Jesus the more illustrious; for it produced fresh proofs of his meekness and wisdom. His followers, also, should remember, that, while they preserve a proper temper under malicious calumnies and reproaches, they afford such an evidence of their sincerity, and the excellency of their principles, as must eventually turn to the confusion of their enemies. Our Lord spoke in his own vindication; but his defence went rather to convince, or at least to silence, his adversaries, than to justify himself. "It is a very small thing, that we should be judged of man's judgment;" and therefore, if we be ever so much traduced (and it is not possible that we can be more so than the Saviour), let us not be solicitous, on our own account merely, to obviate the charges which envy or malevolence may bring against us. Yet there may be

reasons which render it expedient to reply.

Jesus showed that he was privy to their thoughts. for he spoke to their secret surmises, while he proved their objections to be most foolish and profane. He argued that Satan would never oppose his own interest, or dispossess himself; for such a conduct would infallibly weaken, and even destroy, his kingdom amongst men: and on the same ground we maintain that the Gospel, which contains a system of religion, manifestly subversive of the devil's influence in the world, must be from Heaven. He alleged, that as they believed some of their own disciples to cast out demons by the Spirit of God, they ought not to ascribe his miracles to any other cause. On their own principles he convicted them of the most partial and unjust judgment, in not allowing those dispossessions, which he had effected, to proceed from the Holy Ghost, as well as those which were accompanied by the exorcisms of their own adherents. He then contended, that, granting a divine agency in what he had performed, they must also admit that he was come to set up the kingdom of God among them; and,

therefore, instead of foolishly and maliciously cavilling at him, they ought with profound humility to solicit a place in that kingdom. The fact was, that Satan, who had long maintained an undisturbed dominion, was now in various instances deprived of his influence. His authority was so far destroyed; many of those, whom he had held in cruel bondage, being rescued out of his hands by the superior and irresistible power of Jesus. The inference then was clear and decisive, that he, who "destroyed the works of the devil," could not be his confederate.

Our Lord proceeded to warn them that it was impossible for them to observe a neutrality in the contest which he had instituted against the prince of darkness, and that all were required to declare themselves either on one side or the other. The same warfare is still carried on, and it holds good to this present day, "He that is not with him is against him; and he that gathereth not with him scattereth abroad." He commands us, in the most explicit manner, to espouse his cause with cordiality, and support it with vigour. On which side then do we stand? Here are two Leaders, of opposite interests, never to be reconciled: and it is indispensably requisite that every man show himself, decidedly and actively, for the one and against the other. Have we entered into the service of Jesus? Are we "with him;" sincerely, without dissimulation; uniformly, without wavering; and universally, without reserve? This he demands. Yet how many are satisfied, merely because they do not set themselves in an avowed resistance against Christ and his measures! You, who do not oppose the Gospel or its professors, may boast of your candour and liberality; and, as you are not open enemies, may presume upon being accounted his friends. But you are most unhappily deluded. Your indifference about his cause he considers as a marked contempt of him; and therefore he thanks you not for abstaining

from hostilities; but, while you refuse to exert yourselves for him, he looks upon you as being in the in-

terest of his grand opponent.

Jesus, perceiving in these proud and malevolent cavillers a confirmed hatred of him, warned them still further of their danger in daring to ascribe to Satan's agency what had been effected only by the divine Spirit. He declared, that, while the Gospel offers a full and free forgiveness of "all manner of sin and blasphemy," one offence is excepted, and that "the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men."

This is a most tremendous assertion indeed! It should excite a holy fear and circumspection in us all. We ought to beware that we do not even approach to the sin; much less should we imitate the profane effrontery of those who deny or ridicule the operations of the Holy Ghost. It is far better to keep at a distance, than to understand exactly its particular nature and precise limits. But it may be proper to inquire of what kind the offence is, of which such awful things are spoken. Many painful apprehensions are entertained by persons of a tender conscience, as if they had certainly committed it, and therefore, by the divine decree, were absolutely and for ever excluded from mercy. But so far, perhaps, we may confidently affirm, that those, who are most oppressed with the dread, are least in danger of having contracted the enormous guilt.

From a comparison of the different passages in the sacred Scriptures, where the sin is mentioned \*, it appears to be an entire rejection of the Gospel. And, since there is no other remedy for our fallen state, who shall dare to complain, whatever be their punishment, after their own deliberate refusal of salvation? Yet this is not all: it is an avowed and continued opposition to the grace of Christ. The Pharisees, to

<sup>\*</sup> Heb. vi. 4-6. x. 26-29. 1 John v. 16.

whom our Lord spoke, persecuted and calumniated him, as acting under the direction of Satan. Shall we say, then, that decided enmity against him is, of itself, unpardonable? Many, who have made long and furious resistance to him, have found mercy. St. Paul himself had once been "a blasphemer and a persecutor:" and it is probable that some, who had "crucified the Lord of glory," were redeemed to God by the very blood which they shed. But they sinned ignorantly. The offence here specified is committed against strong evidence and conviction of the truth. One miracle upon another had been wrought in the sight of those very people who still persisted in reviling our Lord; and probably they acted in repugnance to the full persuasion of their own minds. Yet it is supposed by some that Jesus referred, not to the case of those presumptuous opposers, but of such as should witness the extraordinary effusion of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles, and should then ascribe his operations to the influence of Satan, rejecting the Gospel as a base and impious fraud. Certain it is that the persons liable to this condemnation are those who have received the clearest information, the most decisive testimony, and deepest impressions of religion upon their hearts; and yet, in defiance of all, put away from them the salvation of God, with a blasphemous contempt. Such is the description given of the unpardonable apostate. It should still be remarked, that "backsliding," though attended with circumstances of peculiar aggravation, may obtain forgiveness with God; and that then only we may fear it is the black offence to which remission is denied, when it involves in it a malicious and confirmed opposition to the truth. For it should carefully be noted that it is never followed by contrition or godly sorrow, but always accompanied with an unrelenting obduracy of mind. The apostate, whose case is desperate, cannot be "renewed unto repentance." Those, therefore, who feel a tenderness of conscience and a real compunction of heart for the guilt they have contracted, and who seek deliverance by the blood of Jesus, afford the strongest evidence that the sin here spoken of is not chargeable to their account, however they may be oppressed by the painful apprehension. After all, any other wilful transgression against God, if persevered in, will be fatal and damnable to the soul; and yet, in every instance, forgiveness is in this life promised and granted to the

humble and believing penitent.

But why, it may be asked, was this severe admonition addressed to the Pharisees? Had they cast off all regard to religion? No: but their professions were hypocritical, as their words and actions clearly proved. Jesus, therefore, exhorted them to a consistency of conduct, either in one way or another, by giving up themselves to God sincerely and without reserve, or else by throwing off their pretences to piety, and appearing openly and avowedly wicked, that so the fruit might accord with the nature of the tree \*. They had uttered blasphemous expressions, from which he proceeded to convict them of their guilt and danger. He affirmed that they had spoken agreeably to their inward dispositions, and that the source of all foolish and profane conversation lies in a depraved and unconverted heart. Lest this should be made light of, as if words alone, being no more than a mere breath of air, were of little consequence, he warned them that God would soon call them to judgment, not only for their daring and impious assertions, but for all their vain and idle talk, and that their common discourse would be adduced as an evidence of the state of their minds, either to their acquittal or condemnation.

And do these things concern none but the ancient Pharisees? Shall not we also be tried for the words

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xii. 33, &c. Mark iii. 31, &c. Luke xi. 24—56.

of our lips, and our eternal doom be assigned according to the attestation which they shall deliver? Yet who considers the tendency of his conversation, or endeavours so to order it that he may not be ashamed to "give account thereof in the day of judgment?" If "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," how shall we stand the test; or what will our prevailing tempers and passions appear to have been? Do not the mouths of many among us utter blasphemy; and others delight in expressions of lewdness, slander, and reviling? Where are those who conform to the apostolic rule? "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good, to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers \*." Is the discourse of the most eminent believers as spiritual and heavenly as might be expected from their high character? O let us pray, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips; and let my words be acceptable in thy sight †."

Did the solemn warning, then, convince or silence the Pharisees? No: they perceived that he claimed a dignity which they were unwilling to acknowledge; and therefore they complained of the want of evidence, and demanded some further sign, desiring, perhaps, a visible display of his divine glory, or an appearance from heaven, which should carry absolute demonstration with it. How preposterous was this! Shall proud and obdurate sinners prescribe to God by what particular kind or degree of testimony he shall confirm his own revelations to them? Jesus, therefore, declared that no other sort of attestation should be granted till his own resurrection, which, he foretold, would happen on the third day from his death, agreeably to its typical resemblance in Jonah's miraculous deliverance. He reproved them for their obstinate impenitence and unbelief; he threatened

<sup>\*</sup> Eph. iv. 29. + Psal. xix, 14. cxli. 3.

them with the most aggravated punishment. The Ninevites had repented at the preaching of Jonah, but they had despised a greater Prophet. He referred them, also, to the queen of Sheba, who had travelled from a remote country, with much pains and expense, that she might profit by the wisdom of Solomon, while they had shown the utmost contempt and hatred of him, who was far superior to Solomon; and he warned them that her example would con-

demn their perverseness.

Are we satisfied with the proofs brought in favour of the Gospel? Nothing, indeed, but a proud or sensual disposition, will lead us to deny their sufficiency. Many in our own day, like the unbelievers of old, call for additional and stronger evidence, and presumptuously refuse to examine that which is already proposed to them. But the Lord God is not at their command; nor will he model his dispensations according to their wishes. O beware, lest in righteous judgment for your arrogance, he leave you to yourselves! "Light is come into the world;" and if your eyes have not discerned its excellency, the reason is, you have "loved darkness rather than light;" and your final condemnation will be much more aggravated when you are compared with others who have made good improvement of inferior advantages.

Better things might have been expected from many of our Lord's captious hearers, who had once discovered a hopeful disposition. The kingdom of Satan seemed to be shaken amongst them; but they fell back again to their former condition of a willing subjection to his government, and gave him a more entire ascendancy over their minds; and therefore Jesus foretold that their "last state would be worse than the first." On this occasion he delivered the parable of the relapsing demoniac. The evil spirit may depart for a time, as if he had quitted his hold of the

poor enslaved sinner, and yet may return to his possession. The door being open, the heart prepared to comply with his suggestions, and no contrary principle forbidding his admission, he will enter with greater strength, and lead the captive soul with increasing obduracy from one degree of wickedness to another.

This describes a common case. Many are deeply affected by the faithful and lively preaching of the Gospel; and a temporary reformation takes place. Their attention may be roused, their passions moved, and especially their fears alarmed by the striking addresses of some plain practical preacher; and then they cannot continue in the same vain and sinful habits as before. Like Herod, who "heard John the Baptist gladly, and did many things," they may express a warm approbation of the minister, and amend their conduct, at least in certain enormities; so that it may seem as if the evil spirit was expelled. But they rest in a mere external change, and fail of a real conversion of the heart; and therefore Satan, who has withdrawn his influence for a time, obtains a free admission again. The habitation is made ready for his reception; and he returns with seven-fold force. How terrible the consequence! A relapse is often more to be dreaded than the first attack of a disorder. "Evil men and seducers wax worse and worse \*:" "the latter end is worse with them than the beginning t." Let us, therefore, implore the God of all grace, so to drive out the prince of darkness, that He himself may take full and everlasting possession of our souls, and nothing be "able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In this awful manner Jesus continued to preach the word with unshaken fortitude and unwearied patience, exposing himself to the malevolence of his enemies by his pointed reproofs, and exhausting his

<sup>\* 2</sup> Tim. iii. 13. † 2 Pet. ii. 20.

bodily strength by incessant labours. While he was thus employed, a certain woman, impressed by his exhortations, exclaimed, as if in envious admiration of the happiness of her who was favoured with such a Son: but he replied, that a far greater privilege is conferred on those who believe and obey the Gospel. His pious mother, together with some near relations, stood at a distance, and, probably, through anxiety for his welfare, wished to call him away. It seems they were prevented from approaching by the surrounding multitudes. It was, therefore, intimated to him, that they were waiting to speak with him. But he, still intent upon his important work, and to encourage the attendance of his faithful followers, declared that those who truly received and practised his word were much dearer to him than the nearest among his earthly connexions, merely as such, could possibly be. He meant not to slight his mother or any of his kindred, but to show that we should be superior to all carnal and worldly regards, by looking beyond the ties of consanguinity; and, in order to animate his disciples to diligence and perseverance in his service, he took that opportunity of expressing his warmest affection for them.

Are any persons ready to congratulate the blessed Virgin, who had the distinguished honour of bringing forth the Saviour of mankind? The way is here pointed out, in which you may obtain a superior dignity. Only yield an unfeigned respect to the Gospel, give up your whole hearts to God, and walk in cheerful obedience to his commands, and you shall be happier, and dearer to Jesus, than any natural relation to him could make you. If you profess a peculiar attachment, and number yourselves among his followers, we ask, whether you are willing to walk in holiness as he requires. Or, are you satisfied with paying him an unmeaning compliment, as if it could please him to cry "Lord, Lord," while you regard not his precepts? Observe,

that he pronounces his benediction upon those who not only HEAR, but DO, his word, and perform the "will of his Father." Are you such? Or, are you not conscious that some or other of your tempers and practices expressly contradict his injunctions? You must search out, and put away from you "the accursed thing," which he hateth; or else it were

presumption to expect his favourable notice.

You, who have devoted yourselves to him "without partiality and without hypocrisy," may take fresh
courage, since you are assured from his own mouth
how dear you are to him. You are in his account as
"a brother, a sister, and a mother." Do you know
what those tender names imply? Yet you cannot
conceive the strength of his affection for you. How
ample is the recompense he bestows for all you can
do or suffer in his cause! O, let a sense of his unmerited and extensive love excite you to more vigorous and cheerful exertions, that you may express
your gratitude, and promote his glory!

But let "the sinners in Zion be afraid, and fear-fulness surprise the hypocrites." The eye of Jesus discerns your insincerity under every specious disguise which you may assume. And in what light do you appear before him? Does he regard you as "a brother, a sister, and a mother?" No: he detests the baseness of your character; and he will avenge the insults you put upon him. O, cast off the mask of an unsound profession; confess your iniquity; sue to him for pardon, while he waits to be gracious; and implore the influence of his Spirit, "to the end he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness!"

## JESUS CHRIST.

## SECT. 17.

Jesus repaired to the sea-shore, and instructed the multitude by the parables of the sower—the tares—the growth of corn—the grain of mustard-seed—the leaven in meal—the treusure hid in a field—the pearl of great price—and the net gathering different kinds of fishes.

The life, at least the public life, of Jesus, was very short; but, being employed in almost constant exertions for the glory of God and the benefit of men, it was crowded with important events. If we possessed a larger measure of his activity and zeal, much might be done in the contracted period of our existence upon earth; for our usefulness depends not on length of days, but on their diligent improvement.

The friends of Jesus were, perhaps, apprehensive that he would impair his strength by incessant labours; and therefore they endeavoured to draw him away from the multitude, that he might have some intermission. Probably, he yielded to their importunity, and retired; but "The same day" he appeared again in public, concerned for the people, who came from all parts to hear his heavenly doctrines. It cannot be wrong to pay a prudent regard to our health; for religion requires not any efforts, to which our bodily frame is unequal. But, from an attention to ourselves, let us not plead for indolence, or neglect those opportunities of doing good, which are, evidently, within our power. May it please God to "shed

abroad his love in our hearts by the Holy Ghost," that his work may ever be our delight! Then shall we lament that our usefulness is so confined, and that our best exertions bear no proportion to the extent of our desires.

No sooner did Jesus quit the house to which he had withdrawn, than immense numbers surrounded him, as before\*. Being situated near the sea, for the better convenience of delivering his instructions, he entered into a ship, from which he addressed the people, who stood upon the shore in a serious and respectful manner to hear him. He spake to them by parables, that is, by certain likenesses or representations, taken from the ordinary occurrences of life, in which, while a common history seems to be related, some spiritual information is meant to be conveyed. This method of teaching was frequent among the ancients; and it is happily calculated to strike the mind, and leave a lasting impression upon the memory. He proposed, to the consideration of the audience then assembled before him, various similitudes of this kind, all of them tending to show the nature of his kingdom upon earth, the character of its true members, its gradual augmentation, and invaluable blessings.

The parable of the sower stands first in order. Here an attentive and diligent husbandman is exhibited in the cultivation of an extensive field. Desirous of procuring a large increase, he took care that good seed should be sown upon every part of it; but, as it consisted of different sorts of soil, the effect was very different. In one place, where the ground was hard as a beaten path, the seed could not enter, and, as it lay exposed, was either destroyed by the feet of passengers, or devoured by the birds. Another place afforded a promising appearance for a short time: the ground was rocky, \* Matt. xiii, 1-23. Mark iv, 1-25. Luke viii, 4-18.

being covered only with a thin coat of earth; and this for a while gave nourishment to the grain which was cast upon it; but, having no depth, it could not defend the root from the scorching sun; and therefore the whole of the produce soon withered away. A third situation proved unfavourable to the good seed; for the thorns, which grew there, checked the efforts of the rising corn, and effectually prevented it from coming to maturity. Was, therefore, all the labour vain? No: there was one portion of the field which answered the expectations of the owner: it brought forth a plentiful increase, though in various degrees, which gradually ripened till the time of harvest, and was then gathered into the barn.

At the conclusion of this little narration, Jesus required his audience to fix their attention upon it, as involving truths of the greatest importance. He proclaimed aloud, "He that hath ears to ear, let him hear;" which intimated that some would understand and regard the instruction, whilst it would be totally

lost upon others.

But wherefore did he use such a studied obscurity in his preaching? His very disciples seemed unable to account for it, and therefore afterwards put the question in private, "Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" and besought him to explain his design. This gave him occasion to vindicate that peculiar manner of teaching. A parable will readily be comprehended by those who are seriously disposed, and desirous of useful information; but to others it may appear to have no meaning, or none of any consequence. This, he observed, was intended in just judgment against those who had despised his plainest declarations. He replied to his disciples to the following effect: "The mysteries of the kingdom, which remain a secret to them, are in rich mercy revealed unto you, my beloved friends.

And this method is agreeable to the righteous proceedings of God, who in general dispenses his favours to men according to their temper and improvement. Those, therefore, who have refused to be convinced on the strongest evidence, and have contemptuously rejected all the offers of my grace, shall be given up to a judicial blindness and ob-duracy; so that, how long soever they may be spared under means and ordinances, they never will be brought to a true and spiritual understanding of the Gospel. How great, then, is your blessedness, who have obtained a divine illumination, whereby you perceive the doctrines which I deliver, and feel their powerful influence upon your minds! You are distinguished above the most eminent saints of old, who saw but through a glass darkly, and looked forwards with ardent desires to the advantages and privileges which you now enjoy."

Such was the purport of our Lord's interesting address to his disciples; and a solemn warning it conveys to us. We must render an account to God for the religious opportunities with which we are favoured. He hath sent to us the Gospel of his Son, and He will shortly inquire what reception we have given it. Are there not many among us who will not even examine it with seriousness, but, like the Pharisees, disdainfully put away the truth from them? No wonder, then, that to you, who are of this character, the doctrines of Jesus appear obscure or inconsistent. O, be afraid, lest, while you shut your eyes and stop your ears, God determine in his wrath that they never shall be opened! The day of grace may be expired with respect to some, even while they are suffered to remain upon earth. O, listen to those, who beseech you "that ye receive not the grace of God in vain!"—"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation \*!

This very caution is inculcated in the parable before us. That we may enter more fully into the subject, let us advert to our Lord's explanation. Jesus is "the Sower," who by himself and his ministers scatters abroad the good seed of his word. But, alas! the most excellent instruction does not always produce the desired effects: through various causes men are prevented from receiving that real advantage which it is calculated to promote. These causes exist in the men themselves.

Some are hard and impenetrable as the ground on which they tread; fitly compared, therefore, to "the way-side." They give no serious attention to the momentous truths which they hear, nor take any pains to understand them. Upon these, then, no good impression is made: the word preached to them is soon forgotten and lost; they do not even resist the attempts of Satan, who is hovering around, like a bird of prey, and who, to frustrate the design of the Gospel, will artfully contrive to divert their minds from it, by proposing subjects more pleasing to their carnal nature.

But others are affected with the declarations of the Gospel. So far the seed is admitted, as their passions are moved by the things which are spoken to them. They listen with avidity, form the best resolutions, and discover an ardent zeal for religion. But, alas! like the rocky ground, they have no depth; and therefore their convictions are hasty and superficial, not being able to penetrate their hearts. Their professions may be warm, and excite notice and admiration; but the trying season is at hand, in which alt their fine appearances will wither away. Troubles, like the scorching sun, will prove that their principles have not taken firm root within, as these have not influence enough to support them.

A third sort may also promise fair, and preserve a show of piety for a length of time. The blade springs up, and endures the various changes of the weather. Yet it does not thrive; for thorns surround and choke it. Ah! how many constantly attend upon the ministry of the Gospel, in whom no saving effect is produced! The cares, riches, and pleasures of life, so engross their minds, that no proper heed can be given to the truth which is heard; and, of consequence, it is lost upon them; for, with a heart so much attached to secular concerns, they cannot possess any spiritual life or vigour. They may maintain their place in the visible church; but, when we look for the fruits of righteousness, we are disappointed, and their religion is vain.

The labour, however, of the husbandman, is not in every instance unprofitable. There are those who resemble the good ground, who are prepared by divine grace for a due reception of the heavenly word. Their supreme regard is fixed upon it; they perceive its important meaning, and cherish it in their hearts, till its grand design is answered. "They walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God\*." A difference, indeed, in their excellence and usefulness, is observable; but all bring forth fruit to maturity, and some in an eminent degree. Their sincerity is proved by their perseverance in holiness. They endure every trial; they stand both the winter's cold and the summer's heat, and "go on unto perfection."

Can we avoid making the application? If we are favoured with the preaching of "the everlasting Gospel," and constantly attend upon it, let us inquire, What is the effect produced? Do we seriously meditate on what we hear? Is any deep and lasting impression fixed upon our minds? Are any spiritual principles implanted, and habits formed? Is our religion such as will carry us through temptations and

persecutions? Is it such as renders us superior to the solicitations of the flesh, and the allurements of the world? Do none of these things take up that time and thought which should be devoted to the care of the soul? And are we not, consequently, in a lean and barren state, notwithstanding the faithful administration of the sacred ordinances around us? If those only receive real advantage from the Gospel, who are so affected by it as to bring forth the substantial fruits of holiness, do we come under that description? Or what is the profit which has accrued

from our profession?

The Saviour subjoined a most solemn caution, reminding his disciples that divine light was communicated to them for the benefit of others, and that they should make a good improvement of the instructions delivered, by recommending the same inportant truths to the world around them. And ought not we, also, to consider for what intent our religious privileges are bestowed upon us? Do we shine, in our respective places, as "lights of the world," desirous to impart knowledge to them who are in darkness? It should be remembered, that, if our distinguished favours are not turned to some useful account, we may not only be soon deprived of them, but shall be severely condemned for the neglect.

On the same occasion, it should seem, our Lord delivered the parable of the tares \*. Here again a common story is related, for the purpose of communicating spiritual information. A field was sown with good seed, which, from its favourable growth, promised a plentiful increase. But, through the malicious interference of one who was an enemy to the owner of the land, and through the negligence of the servants, to whom it was committed, tares were scattered among the wheat. The injury was not

discovered till the fruit of the corn appeared; and then it was proposed to root up the noxious weeds, which obstructed the ripening of the crop. The master, however, rejected that scheme, as being attended with some danger, and allowed the tares to remain, commanding only that in the time of harvest they should be carefully separated, and consumed by fire, while the good grain should be collected and secured in the storehouse.

What instruction, then, does this narrative convey? The disciples did not at first perceive it, and therefore afterwards, when Jesus retired, they requested him to explain it. In condescension to their inquiries, he gave a clear and minute interpretation; from which we learn that the parable exhibits the present state of his kingdom, or the visible church, as it consists of a mixed company, hypocritical pretenders as well as real believers. These may not always be distinguishable from each other, and for wise purposes may be suffered to continue in the same religious community. The latter only are "the children of the kingdom," entitled to its blessings; and they possess their high privileges merely by the grace of Jesus; for He it is who sows the good seed in his field. The former are "the children of the wicked one," being induced by his influence to put on the semblance of piety; whilst they still bear his likeness, cheerfully comply with his temptations, and do his work. In the rashness of our zeal, we might sometimes wish a greater separation to be made than the present system of things will admit; we might wish that the saints of God were no longer "vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked." But we must wait for that event till the end of the world, the great harvest; and then, how accurate will be the distinction of characters, how wide the difference between them! The reapers, who are the angels of God, cannot err in the awful division which

they shall make, or appoint any individual to an improper place. Every tare shall be burned with fire: every grain of wheat shall be safely lodged in the heavenly garner. How tremendous the destruction of the ungodly in that "furnace of fire, where shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth!" How excellent the glory into which the righteous shall enter, where they "shall shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father!"

May God excite in us "great searchings of heart!" What is our present character? What our future prospect? We are fixed in the outward church of Christ; but we are not therefore secure of an admission into his blissful presence above. Possibly we may wear the garb of sanctity; and others may not suspect any insincerity in us. But unless we are renewed in righteousness, and "have our fruit unto holiness," our hope is presumptuous, and our "expectations shall perish." Nor let the impenitent flatter themselves that they shall escape detection in the midst of so immense a multitude. Sinners, be assured that the eye of God perfectly discerns you now, and that his hand will find you out hereafter. Whatever fair appearances you may assume, or whatever plausible excuses you may frame, His righteous judgment shall be executed: "These shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal \*."

Our Lord also delivered, probably to the same audience, various other similitudes, all of them in-

structive and important †.

He referred them to the gradual increase of corn, by the inexplicable principle of vegetation, as a representation of the progress of his spiritual kingdom. The seed is cast into the ground, and, without any further care of the husbandman, it rises insensibly,

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xxv. 46.

<sup>+</sup> Matt. xiii. 31-35. 44-53. Mark iv. 26-34.

and advances by degrees to a state of maturity, when, being fully ripe, it is cut down, and gathered into the barn.

The interpretation is obvious. The work of God, both in the church as a community, and in the heart of each individual believer, is carried on imperceptibly, like the growth of corn, in a way which depends not on human management, and which we cannot explain. The seed may appear to perish in the earth, or the blade to spring up in a very slow manner, while the mysterious process goes forward without interruption. Let us not despond, though we see not the most favourable appearances at once; nor let us be impatient, though we perceive not, after a length of time, the perfection of grace either in ourselves or others. Let us pray that the Gospel may spread its influence from one kingdom to another, and that we ourselves may "go from strength to strength." We wait for the harvest: may we all be ripening for it; that, when the great Reaper "putteth in the sickle" (as he will at the hour of death, with respect to every separate person), we may be received into his celestial garner !

The same instruction is conveyed in the parable of the grain of mustard-seed. This, though one of the least of seeds, it is observed, produced in eastern countries a tree so large, that the birds-might build their nests in its branches. The astonishing increase exhibits the mighty power of God in his providence; and equally illustrious is the display of his grace in causing his Gospel to spread and flourish, from the smallest and most contemptible appearances, till it shall fill the earth, and afford a refuge in the church for men of all ranks and characters, and for all the nations of the world. The progress in our day may seem inconsiderable; but we look forwards, with cheerful hopes, to those

glorious times, when the branches of this tree shall be so enlarged as to reach the most distant lands: for "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ\*." The case is similar with respect to the establishment of divine grace in the heart of every Christian. This holy principle may seem, in its beginning, to possess little influence, and promise no great improvement. But the plant is under the peculiar care of Heaven, and, being watered from above, it shall thrive and prosper. It shall gradually extend its shoots, till it occupy every part of the soul, in which it has been fixed.

Our Lord confirmed and illustrated this truth by the parable of the leaven, which he described as put into a large quantity of meal. This, being inconsiderable in its bulk, may lie concealed for a time, as if it had no effect; but its operation, though secret, is powerful; and, as its fermentation spreads by degrees, it will diffuse itself through the whole mass. Just so the Gospel, which was of little account in the world at first, is in a progressive state, and, we trust, will increase more and more, till it reduce all nations to "the obedience of faith." "A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation. The Lord will hasten it in his time †." Nor is the case at all different, wherever the sacred influence of God's Spirit is put into the heart. For a season it may not excite notice; much weakness may seem to attend its first efforts, so that the change produced may not show itself in every part, or in any remarkable manner. But the operation, which is accompanied with a mighty energy, will be effectual in the end. It will be felt in every faculty and member, and gain a complete ascendancy over the whole man. Such is the usual advancement of religion in the soul.

<sup>\*</sup> Rev. xi. 15. + Isa. lx, 2?.

Is this what we are acquainted with, in our own particular state? We would encourage any favourable appearances, any feeble attempts to serve God "in spirit and in truth." "For who hath despised the day of small things \*?" Yet we are taught to expect a gradual progress; and therefore we inquire, Are we growing in grace? Do we increase in spiritual light and vigour, and become more and more confirmed in holy principles and habits? Doubtless we should feel an ardent desire that the Gospel may extend its influence from house to house, and from town to town, in every nation, till it reach the remotest corners of the earth. But let us not forget ourselves, nor cease to lift up our prayer, that, professing the truth of God, we may feel more of the efficacy of our own principles, and be gradually transformed into the divine likeness, "from glory to glory." May the sanctifying energy of our religion diffuse itself throughout all our faculties, and bring our affections, words, and actions, into subjection under the government of Christ!

Thus Jesus continued to describe the nature of his kingdom by figurative illustrations. This method of teaching, indeed, has something of obscurity in it; and that obscurity was intended: for many of his audience could not bear a more clear and avowed declaration, so that he might have hazarded his life by speaking more explicitly. Besides, in this very way of delivering his instructions by parables, he accommodated himself to an ancient Scripture, which

is therefore said to be fulfilled in him.

Other similitudes were added, which were calculated to give direction and encouragement to his disciples. The Gospel may fitly be compared to an immense treasure; it is an inexhaustible mine of spiritual riches. This may be represented as "hid in a field:" the valuable substance, not being exposed

on the surface, may escape the notice of careless observers, and cannot be explored without much pains. Men of carnal dispositions are not aware how many and precious blessings are comprised in that salvation which they neglect and despise. But those who perceive its transcendent worth will "rejoice as one that findeth great spoil \*," and gladly relinquish every other possession, if necessary, that they may secure it for their own. Who, then, among us, are desirous to purchase this field, which contains such inexpressible wealth? Alas! do you not betray your ignorance of "the kingdom of heaven," who estimate the Gospel at a low rate? It would not pass with you for a trifle, as it now does, if you were acquainted with its hidden treasure. You would not scruple to part with any thing for Christ's sake, if you properly understood the value of his grace. You pour contempt upon him if you do not prefer him to the best enjoyments of the world, or if you hesitate to sacrifice them all when they stand in competition with him.

This also we learn from the parable of the pearl of great price. A merchant, in search of rich commodities, having discovered a pearl of peculiar excellency, abandoned every other pursuit, and relinquished all his gains, that he might purchase that one jewel. Such is the man who obtains a true knowledge of the Saviour, and becomes a member of his kingdom. It may be, he has long been in quest of happiness, and each favourite object appeared to him, for a time, as a beautiful gem: but he found continual disappointment till he heard of Jesus, and beheld something of his glory, when every thing else lost its former charms, and seemed trifling and worthless in comparison. Then he began to desire, most ardently, the grace of Jesus, and fixed all his attention upon that one point, being

<sup>\*</sup> Psal. cxix. 162.

willing to sustain any loss, and renounce every advantage, for the acquisition of that high prize. Have you, then, any proper conceptions of the value of Christ, who shrink from his service, because it requires so many painful sacrifices? Do you apprehend that you shall pay too dear for his benefits? No, Sirs; this is the pearl of so great price, that there can be nothing in the whole world equivalent to it. Give up interest, pleasures, reputation, friends, and relatives, father, mother, brothers, sisters, wife, and children; yet, if Jesus be yours, we will congratulate you on your immense gain. Whatever you lose, you receive "unsearchable and durable riches" in Him; and therefore you may adopt the Apostle's exultation, "As having nothing, and yet possessing all things \*."

But let no man deceive himself. It will not suffice to "name the name of Christ," where there is not cordial attachment to him. And are there not many professors of the Gospel, who, by their formality, worldliness, or sensuality, disgrace the cause? These weaken the hands and distress the hearts of faithful ministers. Yet let us not be staggered, since our Lord has taught us to expect it by the following

similitude

He subjoined another parable, taken from the practice of fishermen. They cast their net into the sea, which collects various kinds of fishes; nor can any separation of them be made till they are brought to the shore: but then the useful are preserved, and the worthless rejected. So mixed is the present state of the church, and such will be the final division of its members. Those, who preach the Gospel, go forth, as it were, upon the wide ocean of the world, to throw the net, desirous of enclosing in it all they can. Many may accordingly be taken, who may not be approved upon an exact scrutiny.

<sup>\* 2</sup> Cor. vi. 10.

And such a scrutiny will be instituted at the end of the world. Who can abide the strict end of the world. Who can abide the strict examination? The angels will part the different characters asunder, however close their connexion may now be. They, who possess only the form of godliness, shall then be for ever excluded from the society of the saints, among whom they were numbered here; and their portion shall be assigned them in "the furnace of fire," where they shall for ever "wail" their sin and folly, and "gnash their teeth" through the extremity of rage, anguish, and despoir

despair.

So solemn and alarming were the addresses of Jesus. And if his servants in the Gospel endeavour to sus. And if his servants in the Gospel endeavour to speak as he did, they must remind their hearers of the important distinction which subsists between them, and thus, by faithful admonitions, "take forth the precious from the vile\*." Their work is difficult, and often painful. How necessary is it for them to be well acquainted with the religion which they teach! Let them attend, then, to the question which Jesus proposed to his disciples: "Have ye understood all these things?" Let them consider, too, what improvement should be made. The Scribes, who are "instructed unto the kingdom of heaven," or properly qualified to declare its mysof heaven," or properly qualified to declare its mysteries, resemble the householder, who has a large family to provide for. They should therefore treasure up every useful observation, that they may always be able to communicate something from their stock, for the service of the family. While they are concerned for their own support, they must employ their fund, whatever it may be, for the benefit of those committed to them, "giving them their portion of meat in due season."

Let prayer be offered to God without ceasing, both for them who preach and them who hear the

Gospel, that the former may dispense the word with all fidelity, and the latter receive it with meekness. Let us thankfully accept the salutary provisions which the great Lord of the household has here set before us, and feed upon them to our spiritual nourishment. May we be led to try our own characters, and be alarmed or comforted, as our case may render most expedient! May God in mercy prevent us from being deceived to our eternal ruin; and, "if in any thing we be otherwise minded" than we ought to be, may he "reveal even this unto us!"

# JESUS CHRIST.

#### SECT. 18.

Jesus replied to some who professed a regard to him—appeased a storm on the sea—cured two possessed persons—rejected by the Gadarenes—returned to Gulilee—healed a woman of her bloody flux—restored Jairus's daughter to life—gave sight to two blind men—expelled a demon—preached again at Nazareth, and in various other places.

"Looking unto Jesus" is not only the bounder duty, but the high privilege, of the real Christian; and therefore it will be his daily and delightful employment. Let us not be weary of contemplating our divine Exemplar. Much we have yet to learn, since we have hitherto seen but little, in comparison, of his excellency. As we attend him through the exercise of his public ministry, we shall observe him in almost every place confirming his heavenly doctrines by incontestable miracles, and affording the strongest evidence that he was indeed "the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

In the evening of the very same day on which he had been teaching the people by parables, he proposed to his disciples to pass over the sea, or the lake of Genesareth\*. As they prepared to take ship, a certain person, and, it should seem, a man of some note, being a Scribe, came to Jesus, professing a high regard for him, and a fixed determination to continue with him, as one of his stated followers. The appearance was pleasing and hopeful, so that we

Matt. viii. 18—27. Mark iv, 35, &c. Luke viii. 22—25, ix. 57, &c.

might have hastily concluded him to be a real convert. But Jesus, who "knew what was in man," discovered an insincerity of heart under this fair disguise. The Scribe probably expected some very lucrative or honourable post, as it was generally thought that the Messiah would establish a temporal dominion. Jesus, however, warned him that no worldly emoluments were to be looked for from the service of so poor and despised a Master. "The foxes," said he, "have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."

How astonishing the declaration! How low and calamitous the situation to which "The Lord from heaven" submitted! Here then we perceive "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich \*." And what could his followers expect but to be sharers of his affliction, and therefore to be destitute of all present comforts and conveniences! "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord." Such an intimation was enough to stagger the resolution of a man who sought only secular advantages; and it is probable that he instantly withdrew.

In another we perceive a far less regard to Jesus than was due to his high character, and in one too who seems to have been a professed disciple for some time. When our Lord called him to a stated attendance, and a renunciation of all other employments, the man was disposed to procrastinate, and therefore, with a view to excuse himself for a season, desired permission to perform the funeral solemnities of his father. The request appeared reasonable; for religion does not forbid, but rather enjoin, all due respect to be shown to friends and relations. But Jesus, knowing it to be a mere pretence, or at least a mark of some reluctancy to engage in the work of

<sup>\* 2</sup> Cor. viii. 9.

God, which might have been augmented by an interview with his former connexions, demanded an immediate compliance with the call. He replied, "Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou, and preach the kingdom of God." As if he had said, "Sooner let any office be neglected than that of the sacred ministry, to which thou art appointed. Leave it therefore to those, who being dead to God are unfit for his service, to bury their deceased kindred: but delay not thou, through any carnal regards, to enter upon and prosecute thy important function."

An example of like sort occurred on another occasion. A third person professed a resolution to become a follower of Jesus. And what prevented him? He had certain affairs to settle, or friends to take leave of, if not to consult. This might seem to us expedient and proper; but there was a secret unsoundness, a wrong attachment to worldly connexions, a wavering mind, a desire to regain the things which had been renounced, as in the case of Lot's wife. Our Lord, therefore, detecting his hypocrisy, replied, "No man, having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

Do not similar instances present themselves under our own observation? Do not many "halt between two opinions?" or "turn to the Lord, not with their whole heart, but feignedly?" Their supreme affections are fixed upon secular objects; and therefore, though with fair and plausible words they declare their approbation of Christianity, they will comply with its dictates no further than their conve-

nience will admit.

Various excuses are urged. It is said, "We have too much business of another kind, to give that attention to religion which is required;" or, "our connexions are unfavourable to our wishes, and we cannot detach ourselves from them." But will these pretexts bear a serious examination? Or will any VOL. IV.

deliberately maintain that the care of the soul and the service of Christ may be safely neglected till every worldly obstruction be removed? If you are unwilling to contend with difficulties, the Saviour will disown you, and treat you as avowed opposers.

"But we intend, after a time, to be his faithful disciples. When this or the other scheme is accomplished, we are resolved to trifle no longer, but to obey his injunctions with the utmost ardour, and without reserve." Ah! Sirs, will he admit of such an answer to the solemn call of his Gospel? He requires your submission now; and for you to talk of yielding a compliance only on a future day, is to declare that you prefer the world to him. You do in fact, therefore, reject him, while you plead for a delay. He knows the ground of your excuses; and remember, he detests the double mind, whatever

specious disguises it may assume.

When Jesus had taken ship, and launched out into the deep, a severe storm arose, and the disciples were distressed by the apprehension of immediate destruction; for the vessel seemed on the very point of sinking. But where was their beloved Master? Wearied out with the labours of the preceding day, he had fallen asleep. What, could he be ignorant or regardless of the danger of his faithful attendants? No: but he designed to try the strength of their confidence in him, and to show their security under his protection. They awoke him, and cried, in terror and anguish, "Lord, save us, we perish." How strange, how inconsistent was this! Will not the weakest believer allow that it was impossible to perish, with Jesus in the ship? But eminent perils will sometimes render even advanced Christians strangely forgetful of their own principles, and prove them defective in faith, as indeed they are in every grace. The fears, perplexities, and despondency, which some of them discover in such situations, sufficiently evince it.

Jesus reproved them sharply for their unbelief; and then, to encourage their unreserved reliance upon him in every future difficulty, and to demonstrate that all nature was at his command, he arose with a peculiar majesty, and spake the authoritative word: the furious winds instantly ceased to blow, and the turbulent sea was calm. Such a grand display of his divine power astonished them: "the men marvelled." They ought, indeed, to have recollected that he was the God of the whole creation; and this very miracle might have led them to that conclusion. "O Lord God of hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto thee? Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them \*." But so much darkness yet remained in their minds, that they had no clear or consistent views of "the great mystery of godliness," and perhaps some of them might then consider him as no more than a human being.

The distressed situation of the disciples is an apt emblem of the church, and of many private Christians, in perilous circumstances. It is one principal part of the Redeemer's plan to exercise and prove our faith; and therefore he conducts us through various trials. He affords us his gracious presence, and, while we pass over the tempestuous sea of life, we ought to be satisfied that he is in the vessel with us. If we are his people, we must be secure, because our safety is in him. Let us not presumptuously impeach his wisdom, faithfulness, or love, when he suffers the severest storm to arise, though he should even then seem regardless of our danger. Our busy fears may suggest that we shall surely be lost, and we may be almost overwhelmed with perplexity and despair. His design is that we should show an entire and cheerful dependence upon him; but we soon betray our unbelief, and treat him as the disciples did. If, then, we can trust him no longer than while the calm

<sup>\*</sup> Psal. lxxxix. 8, 9.

continues, "where is our faith?" Or, "why are we so fearful?" Let us be ashamed of our doubtful and suspicious temper; and, adoring the power and grace of this mighty God and Saviour, let us learn, with unshaken confidence, to repose ourselves and our concerns in his hands.

The storm being appeased, they arrived in safety at the country of the Gadarenes, opposite to Galilee; and immediately an occasion was offered for the exhibition of his divine character, which excited general attention \*. There met him two persons possessed with devils, in a state of the utmost distraction and fury, driven out from society, and incapable of being governed or restrained †. Many circumstances in this case are not to be accounted for on any other supposition than that of a real demoniacal influence. We here perceive, indeed, an awful representation of the wretchedness in which we should be involved. if subjected to the malice of infernal spirits. A considerable number (for their name was Legion) had entered into these unhappy men, and reduced them to the most miserable condition. When our Lord beheld the pitiable objects, he commanded the demons to quit their hold. This they were unwilling to do; and yet they were constrained to acknowledge the superior power of Jesus, as "the Son of the most high God;" and were terrified at his presence, as criminals before their judge. Being perfectly aware of that extremity of torment, which will shortly be executed upon them by Christ himself, they requested that their final punishment might not be inflicted before the time. They entreated him also not to dismiss them entirely from that country; and, probably with a mischievous and destructive intention, desired

Matt. viii. 28, &c. ix. 1. Mark v. 1.—21. Luke viii. 26—40. † As St. Mark and St. Luke mention only one person, it should seem that one was more fierce, and therefore more an object of notice, than the other.

permission to enter into a numerous herd of swine in the neighbourhood. Permission accordingly was granted, not to gratify, but confound, their malice; and immediately the whole herd, to the amount of two thousand, rushed into the deep with violence,

and perished in the waters.

This was a remarkable transaction. It has been treated with impious ridicule; but it ought to be observed, as a sufficient answer to objections, that, by this very occurrence. Jesus has demonstrated the reality of possessions, the malevolence of infernal spirits, and their entire subjection to him; for the owned his dominion when they solicited his leave to execute their purpose. He displayed, likewise, his boundless mercy, in "destroying the works of the devil." At the same time, those who had kept the swine were justly punished, by the loss of them, for their avarice and profaneness, as their employment and traffic were illegal. Let us love and praise our gracious Redeemer, who has come to deliver us from so miserable a bondage as that of the powers of darkness. Let us entreat his exertions in our own behalf. and cry to him, "O Lord, give us not over to their malice, but, by thy mighty aid, extricate us out of their hands, and bring us into the glorious liberty of thy dear children!"

The report of this event caused a general consternation among the inhabitants. They flocked in great multitudes to see the Person who had wrought so stupendous a miracle; and, as if struck with a sense of their guilt, and afraid of his presence, lest he should bring some deserved judgments upon them, they unanimously requested him to "depart out of their coasts." Little did they understand what they asked. Shall sinners petition that the Lord of life and glory would leave them to themselves? How dreadful must be the consequence! Better be destitute of all, both friends and substance, than be de-

serted by the Saviour. Yet such is the folly and stupidity of men; they are unwilling to abandon their sensual pleasures and worldly advantages, or to be disturbed in their old practices, however unjustifiable; and therefore they put from them the ministers and the Gospel of Christ, madly supposing they shall be happier without them. They say unto God, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways \*."

How different is the disposition of those who have a true spiritual discernment! They desire nothing so much as the presence of Christ, and communion with him. Their language is, "When wilt thou come unto me? O make thine abode with me, and let me remain under thy shadow!" The persons who had been delivered from Satan's influence were instantly restored to reason and comfort; and they were observed to be "sitting at the feet of Jesus," impressed, no doubt, with unspeakable admiration and gratitude for the grace bestowed upon them. They wished to accompany him upon his departure, and solicited his permission "that they might be with him." But he intended them to be the instruments of usefulness among the people, who were so deeply immersed in ignorance and sin. Though he himself deserted the country, he determined to leave these his chosen witnesses there, and therefore sent them to publish throughout their neighbourhood " what great things the Lord had done for them."

We also, considering ourselves alone, may wish to be constantly sitting at the feet of Jesus, under the instructions of his mouth, and the light of his countenance. But, for the present, he has assigned us other work, to which we must attend. We must bear our testimony for him, in the midst of a dark world, "holding forth the word of life," if not by public preaching, yet by our private conversation,

\* Job xxi. 14.

and show, in our respective places, "what great things he has done for us." Where are those, then, who have such an evidence to give? What have you received at his hands? He yet distributes his gifts, and works deliverance for men. Have you experienced his power to save? Are you the monuments of his grace? Then commend him to others, and declare to your husband, wife, parents, or children, what he can accomplish for them.

Upon his crossing the lake again, and returning to Galilee, multitudes awaited his arrival, and welcomed him with the liveliest joy. How different the reception which he met with in different places! Immediately various applications for relief were made to him, which afforded fresh evidence of his power and

compassion\*.

It has been repeatedly observed that few persons of rank paid any regard to Jesus; but distress will sometimes constrain those, who would otherwise be most reluctant, to come to him. Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, and therefore of some eminence, under the apprehension of losing his only daughter, about twelve years of age, who appeared in a dying state, represented her case to Jesus, and, with expressions of profound veneration for his character, most earnestly entreated his gracious interposition. Our Lord acceded to his request, and followed him without delay, accompanied by immense crowds, who were desirous to witness the event.

A circumstance occurred by the way, which deserves our notice. A poor diseased woman, who had suffered exceedingly by a bloody flux for twelve years, and had spent her whole substance upon physicians without obtaining relief, heard of the extraordinary works of Jesus, and felt a strong persuasion in her mind that he had power to heal her. Yet, afraid, or ashamed, to describe her situation, she came behind... Matt. ix. 18-34. Mark v. 22. &c. Luke viii. 41, &c.

him, and touched the border of his garment, in a believing expectation of a cure. The cure was instantly performed; and such was the change produced within her, as to convince her of its reality. This was entirely concealed from the observation of the people; but Jesus, who was privy to the whole, determined to use the woman's testimony, and to acquaint them with it. At first, through the tremour of her spirits, and an apprehension of being reproved for presumption, she was unwilling to appear; but, finding it in vain to hide herself, she came forward, and, with many tears, declared the miracle in public. Thus he was pleased to manifest his own supernatural influence, and her humble dependence; and for the encouragement, not of her alone, but of others, he said, " Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole: go in peace."

Here was an instance of much weakness, mixed with real belief; and hereby we are taught that Jesus has compassion on our infirmities, and despises not "the day of small things." Come unto him, you who have many fears. Come, however hopeless your case may seem. Like this poor woman, you may have sought relief in vain for a long season; or rather, like her, you may grow worse and worse. The reason is, your application has hitherto been to "physicians of no value." But, turning from all others to Jesus Christ, reach forth your hand, though it be with much trembling, and desire in faith "to touch him;" and immediately "virtue will go out of him,"

for the perfecting your recovery.

Before the ruler of the synagogue had reached his own habitation, a fresh trial arose, enough to shake his confidence. A messenger informed him that his daughter was actually dead, and therefore that it was needless for Jesus to proceed any further. Still, however, the Saviour, who attended him, encouraged him to believe and expect her restoration. They

came at length to the house, where great lamentations were made for the beloved child; and so unquestionable were the marks of her dissolution, that the intimation of her revival was derided. But Jesus, to whom "belong the issues from death," with a peculiar display of majesty called her forth again to life and vigour. The event, so confessedly miraculous, filled all those who had observed it with unspeakable astonishment: but, to avoid ostentation, or for reasons of prudence, he requested them not to

divulge it,

The little narrative conveys much instruction to us. We perceive how uncertain are all human comforts, and are taught to look for painful trials in our families, as well as in our own persons. In such circumstances we may imitate the conduct of Jairus, and apply to Jesus for relief! Yet while we are waiting for his help, it is possible, that, for the further exercise of our faith, increasing troubles may come upon us. Then, in an especial manner, we are required to believe: nor is any deliverance too great to be expected from that Jesus "who quickeneth the dead."

As he departed thence, two blind men followed him with the most importunate cries for relief: "Thou Son of David, have mercy on us." Nor was their petition vain. They were instantly restored to sight: and, though charged with secrecy, they published abroad, probably from emotions of the warmest gratitude, the kindness of their Benefactor.

Immediately afterward, a dumb person under a demoniacal possession was brought to him, and received a perfect cure at his hands. Well might the people, overwhelmed with astonishment, confess "It was never so seen in Israel." What, then, prevented him from being universally acknowledged in his proper character, as the promised Redeemer? The

Pharisees exerted their influence against him, and though they disputed not the facts, blasphemously ascribed them to the agency of Satan. Their malicious cavils had been fully refuted before, and yet they continued to urge the same absurd charges. Just so, in the present day, the weak and profane objections of infidels, which have been repeatedly answered, are produced afresh, and with as much petulance and acrimony as ever. But shall not we conclude from the stupendous miracles of Jesus, that he is "mighty to save?" And, since his power and grace have suffered no diminution, may we not encourage the children of affliction, in all their various distresses, to commend their cases to him, and expect seasonable and effectual relief?

After the above-mentioned occurrences, Jesus returned to Nazareth, the place of his education \*. The inhabitants of this city had basely rejected him already, and even attempted to destroy him; yet he did not forsake them, but again delivered his solemn instructions in their synagogue on the sabbath-day. Many of them felt a powerful impression from his preaching. They were astonished at his words: but no good effect ensued; for they took offence. Various objections were raised, chiefly from his mean extraction, the poverty of his relations, and the low trade to which he was brought up. They looked for a Messiah of high original, invested with worldly honour, pomp, and dominion; and they determined never to receive the man in that exalted character whom they knew to be destitute of all such attractive distinctions.

Opposition of a similar nature is made among ourselves. The grand doctrines of the Gospel are often treated with scorn, because they are not acceptable to "wise men after the flesh, the mighty or the noble;" and the truth of Christ is denied, without

<sup>•</sup> Matt. xiii. 54, &c. ix. 35, &c. Mark, vi. 1-0.

examination, because some of its advocates possess no eminence of rank or abilities. Prejudices of this kind, though extremely absurd, frequently operate most effectually, and prove destructive. O beware! while you are giving way to captious disputation, Jesus may withdraw. He left Nazareth, and, probably, never more returned. He wrought some miracles among them, and they had credible information of what he performed in other places: but "he did not many mighty works there; nay, нь COULD NOT, because of their unbelief." How fatal the consequences of their obstinate infidelity! It stopped the hand of Jesus, and expelled him from their city. He expressed his astonishment at their perverseness; but he ceased to argue with them. O fear their condemnation, if your minds are ill affected towards him! While you are raising this or the other objection, he may take his Gospel from you, and send

it to another people. Not discouraged with the persecution at Nazareth,

he turned his attention to different towns. He declined not the most arduous exertions, but continued to labour from one city and village to another, declaring the good tidings of salvation, and performing unparalleled acts of mercy. Every where he was followed by immense multitudes, on whom he looked with the most compassionate regard. "They fainted," probably with bodily fatigue: but their spiritual state especially, which was most deplorable, excited his tenderest pity. "They were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." Their pretended guides were such as knew not how to direct them, and cared not for their safety. Therefore they wandered in the paths of ignorance and sin, which would infallibly lead them to destruction. Alas! what could be done for them? They discovered an earnest desire to be instructed in the word of life; but there were few to teach it. He exhorted his disciples, then, to offer up fervent prayer that God would "give them pastors according to his own heart." Their serious attendance upon his ministry in such large numbers, was like the promising appearances of the fields, which denoted a plentiful harvest but labourers were wanted to reap and gather in the valuable produce. And to whom should application be made but to the great Proprietor, who must be concerned for the event? Petitions, therefore should be addressed to him, to supply the deficiency that, by a suitable provision of diligent and faithful men, the rich fruit may be secured for himself, and precious souls no longer "destroyed for lack of

knowledge."

Such a tender regard for the spiritual and everlasting happiness of the human race was a distinguishing feature in the character of Jesus. This, and this alone, is true benevolence. Where are those, who feel the same generous principle, the same ardent desire to promote the salvation of sinners? You, then, will rejoice to see the multitudes of poor ignorant persons, who flock to hear the Gospel preached with plainness and fidelity. Yet you will lament that so few, even of those whose office demands it of them, labour with assiduity to save immortal creatures from destruction. Much of the harvest seems likely to be lost, for want of proper assistance to collect it. O, what fervent prayer should you present to God on this account? Pray that He himself would send forth his servants, endued with all suitable abilities to do his work. He must ordain them to their high function; and He alone can assist and prosper them. Thousands, alas! among us, are " scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." If such be your wretched case, be thankful that there are any who are "moved with compassion on you," and who "watch for your souls." They desire to recover you from your wandering state, to bring you back to the fold of Christ, and to lead you into his "green pastures," where are safety and refreshment. Be willing to follow their directions; and, whatever difficulties they may suffer from other quarters, let them meet with no opposition from you, since it is your salvation for which they labour incessantly. You have been "as sheep going astray;" O "return unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls\*!"

\* 1 Pet. ii. 25.

## JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 19.

Jesus sent forth his twelve Apostles, with miraculous powers, and gave them a solemn charge, for their direction and encouragement.

One principal purpose of our Lord's ministry was to propagate divine truth, and, in particular, to declare and explain the appointed way of access unto God. But, as his public life was so short, and his labours met with so many obstructions, it became expedient to select some faithful men, furnished with proper instructions, to assist him in the work. He had already separated twelve persons out of his constant attendants, who were to observe his directions, and to be employed as chief officers in his church. He had gradually prepared and fitted them for the apostolic function: but hitherto they had acted only under his immediate notice; and now, for the first time, he proceeded to send them out upon a circuit by themselves\*.

"No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God†." The chosen witnesses of Jesus did not obtrude themselves upon him, but waited his summons. He, the great Lord of the harvest, appoints his labourers to their respective posts. When he had assembled them together, in order to deliver their sacred commission to them, he endowed them with miraculous powers, by which, as unquestionable credentials, they might recommend their doctrine, and demonstrate its truth. They were

+ Heb. v. 4.

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. x. 1, &c. xi. 1. Mark vi. 7-13. Luke ix. 1-6.

enabled, with a word, to cast out devils, and to cure the most inveterate diseases.

We offer no remarks, in this place, on the names, characters, and connexions of the Apostles, observing only, in general, that we need not inquire any other reason for their selection than the sovereign will and pleasure of the Lord himself. "Ye have not chosen me," said he, "but I have chosen you\*." And therefore to the most eminent of them the question might be put, "Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive†?"

Before their departure, like a tender father concerned for the welfare of his children, whom he is sending out into the world, foreseeing difficulties, snares, and dangers, he instructed, he warned, he encouraged them, with much solemnity and affection. He directed them to go in pairs, "by two and two," that they might afford mutual support and comfort to each other. At first, their commission was subject to certain limitations. They were to address themselves only to the house of Israel; nor were they empowered to offer salvation to any other people till his final separation from them. This was a peculiar honour and favour bestowed upon the Jews: but, alas! how little were they sensible of the privilege! "They knew not the time of their visitation." Do you ask the reason of this marked distinction, or accuse the Saviour of partiality in the distribution of his blessings? He is not accountable to you for any of his matters. He has an indubitable right to do what He will with his own; and, therefore, to send or to withhold his Gospel, as He pleaseth.

But what was the grand object of the embassy of the Apostles? Hear the purport of their instructions: "As heralds, proclaim with a loud voice, and with all the zeal and courage which such a cause demands,

<sup>\* 1</sup> John xv. 16.

that God is now visiting his people in mercy, and about to set up the promised kingdom of the Redeemer. In attestation of your sacred commission, and of the truth of your doctrine, to prove also that your ministry is designed to answer the most gracious and benevolent purposes, exert the miraculous powers now intrusted to you, as opportunity shall be given, for the relief of the distressed, and not for your own private emolument, which you must cheerfully renounce."

From this part of the charge, how excellent does the religion of Jesus appear! It brings the most reviving intelligence, as it "proclaims the acceptable year of the Lord." It proposes blessings the most valuable, represented by those supernatural cures which the Apostles wrought and dispensed freely, "without money and without price," where no recompense can be expected. Shall we not rejoice that "the kingdom of Heaven" is come unto us? Or shall we hesitate to receive the gracious declarations of these primitive heralds, who exhibited incontestable evidence that they were no other than ambassadors from God? We are assured that in crediting their message we "follow not cunninglydevised fables," while we perceive that "God bore them witness both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will \*." We are thankful that their commission, at first so circumscribed, was afterwards enlarged, and that they were commanded to "go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature †." Otherwise, how would the blessing have been extended to us? But, praised be God, He hath sent his word to the Gentiles, and "granted to them also repentance unto life t."

Imagine the twelve standing round their Lord, to receive the law at his mouth, while he proceeds in

his address, and gives them directions for their conduct. As they were totally unfurnished for their intended expedition, and without any visible means of subsistence, it is probable that anxious thoughts might arise in their minds about obtaining the necessary supplies. But thus the Saviour instructed them: "Of that kind of provision, which men generally make for a journey, you will have no need. Nay, you are forbidden to take such things with you as perhaps you might procure, and prudence might seem to require. You are to expect your constant support from that God in whose cause you go forth. 'Upon Him,' therefore, 'cast all your care, for he careth for you;' nor doubt that his providence will sustain you, though it should be in an extraordinary way. Some will be disposed to show you kindness; and you should not scruple to accept your proper maintenance at the hands of those for whom you labour.

"Upon your first entrance into a town, inquire for such persons as are of the best character.' With them abide, if they are willing to receive you; nor leave them in fickleness or disgust, whatever your accommodations may be; for you ought not to be solicitous about matters so trifling as mere convenience. When you are admitted into their houses, pay them all due courtesy and respect; and, as the ministers of peace, express your good wishes for their peace and comfort. The benediction which you solemnly pronounce shall rest upon those families which are well affected to my Gospel; but it will not profit such as continue in unbelief. Your prayers, however, though ineffectual for others, will not be lost; for they shall bring down the blessing of God upon your own heads. A tremendous wo awaits those who obstinately reject you; and, while you depart from them, you may intimate their awful state by shaking off the dust of your feet, and thus representing the very place as utterly defiled and devoted

to destruction. In the grand, the decisive, day of judgment, those, who have refused to obey the word of my grace, shall perish with more aggravated ruin than even Sodom and Gomorrah, under the venge-

ance of Almighty God."

In this address we discover some discriminating marks of the faithful preachers of the Gospel in every age. May God raise up among ourselves men of this description, to testify "the truth, as it is in Jesus!" It becomes them not to be anxious for their own temporal support, much less to covet worldly dignities or sensual indulgences. While they carry with them a message of peace and love, they should prove, by the kindness of their deportment, that they wish to promote the happiness of all. Yet, in perfect consistence with this meekness, they should possess such courage and fidelity as " to declare all the counsel of God," and solemnly to warn contemptuous sinners of impending destruction. Is the duty of ministers allowed? But do you, to whom they come, consider also what you owe to them and their doctrine? Do you honour their office? Do you seriously regard their exhortations? Possibly a bold and unreserved declaration of the truth may excite your disgust, and draw forth the hidden corruptions of your hearts; at least it will evince your real dispositions. O beware! Those who long for your salvation must admonish you, that you do not, by a scornful rejection of them, bring upon yourselves certain and aggravated condemnation. Though they do not rank themselves with the Apostles, yet the Gospel which they preach has lost nothing of its importance or obligation by the course of time; and the God of heaven is as much concerned now as ever to vindicate its honour. Most assuredly, therefore, though "the men of Sodom were sinners before the Lord exceedingly \*," yet, if you refuse or "neglect so great salvation," your guilt is more heinous than

Gen. xiii. 13.

theirs, and your everlasting misery will be far more

insupportable.

The Apostles had nothing but violent opposition to expect from the wickedness of the world, or, rather, from the corruption of human nature. Their gracious Master, therefore, prepared them for it, suggesting, at the same time, various considerations to encourage their hopes, and invigorate their zeal. He proceeded, in a most affecting manner, to the following purpose:—

"Though you are going forth at my command, in my name, and under my protection, you will not be exempt from enemies. You are to be meek and inoffensive; but you will be surrounded by those, who, being of furious dispositions, may endeavour to harass and devour you. It may be right to use every precaution which prudence may dictate for your own preservation; but beware of 'rendering evil for evil;' and learn rather to 'suffer long, and be kind.'

" Knowing the general depravity of men, trust not yourselves in their hands, but be prepared to meet with bitter persecution from them for your attachment to me. With a show of justice, they will bring you to trial in their courts, and condemn you to the most painful tertures, as the worst of criminals. In this manner you may have occasion to stand before the great men of the earth, and you will embrace the opportunity, to bear witness of me and of my salvation, which otherwise they might not hear of. Such an attestation will be an honour to you, and may prove the means of spiritual benefit to them. Are you discouraged by an apprehension that you shall not be able to speak as you ought, in your own justification, before such auditors? You shall be inspired with wisdom from above; and it shall be immediately suggested by the Holy Ghost what you should advance in vindication of vourselves and the Gospel.

"Nor shall your enemies be these only whose re-

gard you have no peculiar claim to, but even your nearest relatives in life will rise up with furious and murderous rage against you. Brethren, parents, and children, will break through the ties of natural affection, while they are opposing and endeavouring to destroy each other, from a hatred of the truth. Such a bitterness of persecution you will meet with in every place, on account of your cordial regard to me, that you will be held up as the objects of universal detestation. But maintain your integrity, and your firmness in the faith, without wavering; and, whatever you may suffer by the way, the end will bring a glorious recompense.

"Resistance may drive you from one city, but immediately carry your message to nother. Enough remains to be done, nor will you complete your progress through the various parts of Judea till I appear, in awful visitation, to vindicate my cause

against its opponents.

"Are you surprised or staggered at being called out to such painful trials? Remember what I, your Lord and Master, have to endure, and what vile reproaches are cast upon my name; and be content that your treatment in the world should resemble mine. Let not your adversaries terrify or discourage you; for the day is at hand when their malignity and your integrity shall be clearly exhibited, and all these dark dispensations unfolded to your view. the mean time, keep back nothing through fear or reserve; but faithfully and publicly proclaim aloud whatever I have revealed to you in secret. Let them condemn you to the severest tortures: you know the utmost that their malicious rage can inflict. They may destroy the life of the body; but the soul, which is the nobler part, is removed far beyond their reach; so that, though the unanimated flesh be soon reduced to its original dust, the immortal spirit will remain in perfect vigour. But, oh! dread the thought of coming under the indignation of your Almighty Sovereign, whose power extends to another world, and who can render you completely miserable, both in body and soul, and that throughout all eternity.

"Be not distressed by the apprehension of such calamitous events as may await you here. The God of heaven and earth, whose immediate charge you are, cannot forget or desert you. He exercises an universal providence; so that he marks and determines the situation of every creature, though ever so small or worthless, and disposes all their circumstances as He pleases. You, therefore, who are in a peculiar manner the objects of his care, and most valuable in his esteem, may cheerfully confide in his protection. He knows and overrules your minutest concerns, and on this ground you should possess an unshaken fortitude in his service.

"Are you, then, bold and faithful in your profession and defence of my truth? You shall be gloriously distinguished as my beloved friends, and receive a public approbation, and a high recompense of reward, in the presence of my heavenly Father. But those, who, through shame, cowardice, or any worldly regards, shrink from that open declaration of attachment to me, and from those exertions of duty which my Gospel requires, shall be disowned and rejected, with everlasting abhorrence, for the

baseness and malignity of their conduct.

"You may have expected much outward prosperity and peace from the coming of the Messiah, and the establishment of his kingdom; but the real consequence will be directly contrary. Though the tendency of my religion be most excellent, yet, through the corruption of man opposing it, all manner of confusion and violence will ensue. The fiercest contentions between the nearest relatives will take place; so that none, probably, will be so incensed against my faithful servants, as those who may dwell in the same family, and are connected

with them by the closest bonds of friendship and of kindred.

"It is necessary, then, that you should be prepared for the most painful separation. If there be any one, even parent or child, whose favour you prefer to mine, you can have no proper sense of my worth, or of my claims upon you; nor can you possess any part in my salvation. You must be willing to sacrifice your ease, your reputation, and secular interest, for my sake and the Gospel's, and resolutely submit to all hardships and indignities. I, your Leader and Commander, go before you, and therefore you should not hesitate to follow me through much tribulation. Perhaps a violent death may close your sufferings here. Be it so. Those who apostatize from me may lengthen out their existence upon earth a few days longer; but they shall be destroyed for ever; while you, who may shed your blood in my cause and service, shall live and reign, beyond the reach of persecutors, in everlasting happiness and glory. This is enough surely to fix your determination, and inspire you with increasing confidence and zeal.

"You will sustain an important character; nor is it a matter of indifference how you are treated in the world. I solemnly declare, that whatever kindness is shown unto you, while you are acting in my name, it shall be considered as a mark of unfeigned regard to me and my Father; for you go forth as our representatives and ambassadors. He who shall cordially receive my prophets or ministers for the sake of that Gospel which they preach, or even any faithful disciples in private life, from a pure disinterested respect to their character, shall be abundantly repaid for his pious liberality towards them; he shall partake with them of that bliss and glory to which they shall shortly be admitted.

"I commend you, therefore, as my dear children, to the notice of all who are concerned for my cause.

If any one shall afford you the least attention or refreshment by the way, administering only a cup of cold water for your relief, because you belong to me, and are employed in my service, I pledge myself to return that act of kindness in an ample manner. I will not forget, but publicly own, approve, and reward, the labours of love which shall be wrought for my name's sake."

Such was the purport of our Lord's most affecting address to his twelve Apostles, when he sent them forth to evangelize the land. Such tender and earnest wishes did he express for their encouragement, support, and success in their arduous work. Having received their commission and the solemn charge, they proceeded, as they were directed, on the momentous expedition. They carried with them from place to place the gracious overtures of reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ, and called upon all, without exception, to humble themselves before him, under a conviction of their guilt, and to turn from their evil ways with sincere contrition and renovation of heart. Nor did Jesus himself cease from his own vigorous exertions. He continued to bear part of the burden, and persevered in his progress, that he might diffuse the knowledge of salvation all around.

· While we contemplate the office and character of the Apostles, as here exhibited, we are furnished with strong arguments for the authenticity and salutary tendency of the Gospel. Such a plan could never be the contrivance of men: it must be "the power of God, and the wisdom of God\*." It is also so replete with blessings calculated to relieve our wretchedness, that we need not hesitate to pronounce it " worthy of all acceptation †." The subject will likewise lead us, as we have already intimated, to consider what manner of persons they ought to be in modern times, who are the "ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." The case of these primi-

<sup>\* 1</sup> Cor. i. 24. + 1 Tim, i. 15.

tive ambassadors was, in many respects, peculiar. But all those, surely, to whom "the word of reconciliation is committed," should possess the same views and dis-

positions which were required in them.

We may carry the application further, and remark that the holy and heavenly tempers here inculcated are indispensably necessary, not merely for those who preach, but for those who profess, the Gospel. Though you be not invested with a public office in the church of Christ, yet, as called by his name, you should be meek, gentle, and inoffensive. You must be willing to bear the most ignominious and scornful treatment for the sake of your Lord and Master. You must cheerfully submit to the heaviest calamities, in the way of duty, without distrusting the providence of God; and, in every possible situation, avow your attachment to Christ, whatever painful consequences you may suffer. You can never be at liberty to deny him, though your most beloved friends, or those on whom you depend for sustenance, should require you to do it. Let father and mother, wife and children, be dear to you, as they ought to be: but let Jesus be dearer than all. He claims and he deserves your cordial and supreme regard. You do not, therefore, understand his excellency, or your obligations to him, unless you prefer his favour, and the advancement of his glory, to every worldly possession or enjoyment, unless you can give up your nearest kindred, your reputation, emolument, case, or life itself, for his sake, whenever they come in competition.

Where then shall we find such love to the Saviour, such zeal for his name? It is evident that many are totally destitute of these holy principles. Are there not those who are enslaved to sensual pleasures, and determined, as far as possible, to gratify every inclination of their hearts? And to what purpose should we inculcate upon them the necessity of taking up the cross, and following Jesus? they would turn away their cars in contempt or indignation. Yet we must

declare the offensive truth, that "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," are as inconsistent with real Christianity now as they were in primitive times. "Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God\*."

Is it sufficient to assume expressions of respect, and, with demure appearance, upon your bended knees, to pretend a high regard for the Saviour, while you are afraid to advance one step further in his service than may be agreeable to the general maxims and customs of the place in which you live? Does he not account such compliments an insult more odious to him than an avowed opposition? This temporising spirit is as foolish as it is sinful: it pleads prudence, but it tends to destruction. You may contrive to avoid persecution, and procure applause and preferment among men; but what will these avail if Jesus disown you? What shame, confusion, and horror, will overwhelm you, when convicted, before the assembled universe, of treating him with insolent contempt!

May we all, therefore, be persuaded to follow him wherever he shall lead, and to undergo all extremities in his service! Why such a regard to present conveniences? Why such fear of our fellow-creatures, and distrust of God? Do not these things argue much unbelief, and betray an earthly mind?-Let us rise above our little difficulties, and confide in that God who takes care for the very sparrows, and hath numbered the hairs of our heads. He will not be inattentive to our wants, even in this life, if we be faithful to him: and a glorious reward is laid up in heaven for those who are willing to hazard every consequence, from a zealous adherence to his cause. Relying on his promise, may we now surrender ourselves and our all to him! Then shall we stand with confidence and joy before him at the great day of his appearing. Amen.

<sup>\*</sup> James iv. 4.

## JESUS CHRIST.

## SECT. 20.

Jesus, on the return of his Apostles, withdrew with them -fed five thousand by a miracle-retired from the multitude-walked on the sea-stilled the tempesttaught in the synagogue at Capernaum—cavilled at by the Jews, and forsaken by many disciples.

As we advance in the prosecution of our design, and contemplate the wonderful acts of the Son of man, we meet with additional proofs of his high dignity, and the perfection of his character. If we fix our attentive regard on this bright Luminary, such beams of glory will break forth upon us as will fill and almost overpower the soul with admiration of his excel-

lency.

When the Apostles returned from the circuit on which they were sent, they brought back to their Lord an account of their ministry, of the miracles they had performed, and the doctrines they had taught\*. Immediately he withdrew with them to a solitary place, that they might be relieved from their fatigue, and, probably, that they might retire for the purposes of devotion. This was the more necessary, as the vast crowds of people allowed them no leisure. It is expedient for all, especially for those who are actively employed in the sacred functions of religion, to secure some moments to themselves, by retreating from their public engagements, that both their minds and bodies may be recruited.

To obtain the desired privacy, he passed over a part of the sea of Galilee; and great multitudes, who

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xiv. 13, &c. Mark vi. 30, &c. Luke ix. 10, &c. John vi. 1, &c.

had observed his departure, followed him with much eagerness, "because they saw his miracles." They were induced to attend him, many at least, we fear, by no better motives than curiosity or astonishment. The compassionate Jesus, however, upon coming to the shore, where they were ready to receive him, could not look upon them without feeling the most tender concern for their state, remarking, as he had done on a former occasion, that "they were as sheep not having a shepherd." On this account, foregoing his intended rest, he began to renew his labours, and went up with them to a mountain, that he might be heard with convenience: there he opened the nature of his kingdom, and manifested his power by restoring health and vigour to them that were diseased .-Blessed Jesus! we beseech thee still to look with pity "on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way." How immense are their numbers, and how wretched is their condition! Stretch out thine arm to recover them from the paths of error, and reveal thy glories to them. Instruct them in thy truth, and take them into thy fold, as the sheep of thy pasture.

At the close of the day, the disciples, having no stock of provisions, would have dismissed the people. But Jesus, unwilling to send them away without refreshment, proposed a distribution of the food which was at hand. Accordingly, at his word, preparations were made for the wondrous entertainment. They were all marshalled in ranks, and seated in the open air upon the grass. But whence shall a sufficient quantity of meat be procured for so large a multitude; as there were present five thousand men, besides women and children? This was, indeed, a severe trial of the faith of his disciples, who were able to produce no greater store than five loaves and two small fishes. These, however, were brought forth, and, in the hands of Jesus, by an all-creating power, they were so mul-

tiplied as to be more than enough to satisfy the whole company. "They did all eat, and were filled;" and, when the fragments were collected, it was found that such had been the miraculous increase, that the remainder far exceeded the original provisions.

What a grandeur do we perceive in this entertainment, surpassing that which attends the most sumptuous tables of princes! What a fervour of devotion appeared in the great Master of the feast, while he looked up in prayer for the divine blessing, and taught the people to expect their food from Heaven! What an exalted majesty, mixed with the kindest condescension, distinguished his behaviour! Was not every one, then, struck with admiration, and disposed to revere and love him? They concluded without hesitation, and they concluded rightly, "This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world."

Do we draw the same inference? There are strong and convincing reasons which should lead us to it .-When we compare the ancient predictions of the Messiah with the various parts of the life and character of Jesus, we must allow their accomplishment in him, and maintain that he is indeed the promised Saviour. Yet it is possible that the evidence may constrain us to assent to the fact, even while we refuse to give to this Prophet that regard which his high office demands from us. Are we, then, with profound veneration sitting at his feet, and looking to him for instruction? Do we understand or credit the message which he has brought from Heaven? Are we not strangely perverse and infatuated if we acknowledge him to be the Teacher of Israel, the Christ of God, and yet remain unconcerned about his doctrine? Either say at once, He is a base impostor (which few will dare to assert); or else bow with unfeigned submission to him, and pray, "Show me thy ways, O Lord, and teach me thy paths. Make known to me the glorious truths of thy salvation; and speak effec-

tually to my heart, for thy servant heareth."

Or, allowing his sacred character, are we afraid to follow him? The miracle we have considered is calculated to fix and confirm our dependence upon him, as able to provide for our support, and exercising a tender care for our bodies as well as souls. If we are ever so necessitous, we perceive with what ease he can multiply our store. In a thousand ways, which we cannot foresee, he can furnish our tables with plenty. This very instruction was meant to be conveyed to us; and, accordingly, the disciples were afterwards reproved for not remembering the extraordinary occurrence to better purpose, when they were apprehensive of wanting bread to eat\*. Let us learn, then, to "cast all our care upon him," believing that he will "feed us with food convenient for us."

The astonished multitude, concluding him to be the Messiah, and expecting, agreeably to their carnal notions, that he would set up a temporal dominion, were desirous immediately to invest him with regal honours. But so far from entertaining any ambitious designs, or discovering any ostentation, he took pains to avoid public notice and applause. He now withdrew from them in haste. He directed his disciples, also, to depart, and to cross the lake to Bethsaida: perhaps he was anxious to prevent them from favouring the foolish wishes of the people. In the mean time he himself retired to a mountain for prayer, and spent the chief part of the night in his private devotions. Ah! how unlike to him are those of his professed followers, who are solicitous to procure and preserve the pomp and power of this present world! Or, what resemblance to the holy Jesus do those bear, who have no relish for religious solitude, and can spare no time for the exalted purpose of maintaining communion with God?

The disciples were on the sea, where they were overtaken by a storm, and tossed about, for many hours together, upon the boisterous waves. Their situation was distressing: the night was dork, the water tempestuous, the wind violent and contrary: they had spent their strength in vain with rowing; dangers threatened them; and their dear Lord and Master was absent. Jesus, however, could not be unmindful of them; he knew their difficulties, and drew near for their help. He had been retired till near the morning, when he came to them "walking upon the sea." How did he convince them of their safety under his protection! How did he encourage them to face every storm, in his service, while they saw the deep itself subject to his command!

So strange was the sight, that, as they imagined it was not possible for a real human body to be supported by the waves, they concluded it was an apparition, and gave way to perplexing fears. But he, to relieve them from their distress, graciously revealed himself, saying, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." This was enough. The sound of his voice, speaking comfort in such awful circumstances, revived and cheered their hearts. Peter supposed that he also should be able to walk on the boisterous sea, if his Lord would permit him to attempt it. The leave, which he rashly solicited, was granted, that his forwardness might be checked by a sad proof of the weakness of his principles. When he felt the violence of the storm, his faith failed, and he began to sink; so that, if Jesus had not stretched out his compassionate hand to save him, he must have perished in the deep.

Jesus then entered the vessel, and restored peace and comfort to his disciples. Immediately the rage of the wind abated, and they were brought to the very point of land which they aimed at. What proofs of power, what marks of dignity were here! Yet what modesty

and condescension appeared in our Lord's constant deportment! He did not display his ability in an ostentatious manner, or even for his own accommodation, He submitted to travel on foot, with much fatigue. when he could have instantly transported himself to the most distant place. His attendants were filled with inexpressible astonishment, and the more so as they had not duly considered the miracle of the preceding day. They fell down before him, with the strongest emotions of gratitude and love, and with expressions of profound adoration, crying out, "Of a truth thou art the Son of God!" The inhabitants, also, of the neighbouring coasts, no sooner received intelligence of him, than they flocked after him with great eagerness, entreating his compassion toward the sick; and, merely by the touch of his garment, the most inveterate diseases were removed.

Shall not We, likewise, be encouraged to apply to him, who has all power in his hand, and who, in so many instances, has proved himself "mighty to save?" Our faith may be tried, as that of his disciples was, and, probably, our weakness will soon be evinced. "Lord, help our unbelief." He is often pleased to suffer a violent storm to arise, and his people may seem as if they were left alone upon the deep, toiling in extreme distress, ready to perish.—But he will graciously interpose, in due season, to save them. He will manifest himself to them, appease the rage of the tempest, quiet their fears, and "bring them unto their desired haven." "Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his

wonderful works to the children of men\*!"

The multitude, who had been desirous that Jesus should assume the government, and from whom he had withdrawn, sought after him again with renewed ardour. They had travelled far on foot, and then they crossed the lake in search of him. At length they

<sup>\*</sup> Psal. evii 30, 31.

found him in the synagogue at Capernaum, and, after expressing their surprise at his removal to that place, which they could not account for, they received a solemn reproof for the low and carnal motives upon which they followed him. The miraculous entertainment he had afforded them raised their expectations of his possessing a temporal dominion, and they were still in hopes of exalting and enriching themselves by his service. A poor reason, indeed, for pretending an attachment to Jesus! Yet, we fear, a regard to secular advantages has been the ground of much of that religious zeal which has been admired in the world. But it is a mean and contemptible principle. He called upon them, therefore, to turn their attention from the care of the perishable body to that of the immortal soul, and to employ their utmost eagerness and diligence for the attainment of those blessings, which would remain for ever. He declared, also, that he himself, as "the Son of man," had received a commission, from God the Father, freely to bestow this eternal happiness and glory.

They professed an earnest desire to do the will of God; and therefore our Lord asserted the necessity of believing on the Saviour, as a duty indispensably requisite above all others, the grand injunction of the new dispensation, and the appointed method of acceptance with God. His words implied that he was the Christ whom they should receive. Yet many of them were unwilling to admit his claims, and insolently demanded his credentials, as if he had already exhibited none which deserved regard. He had performed various miracles in their neighbourhood, of which they must have had authentic information; and their own eyes had seen unquestionable proofs of his divine mission: and still they presumed to ask, "What dost thou work?" Unbelief is always unreasonable; it cavils at the plainest testimonies, and determines never to be satisfied. We need not, therefore, be surprised at the outcry for stronger evidence, as it is generally made by those whom no evidence will convince.

It was intimated to Jesus that his miracles were far inferior to those of Moses, who had fully demonstrated his sacred character and legation by supporting their ancestors in the wilderness with manna from heaven. He replied that the Lord God was then dispensing to them bread infinitely more excellent than that which Moses had been the means of communicating, and that this bread was no other than the very person who had descended from the highest heavens, for the purpose of giving life to a perishing world. The extraordinary and important declaration probably impressed the minds of some of his audience, and constrained them to cry out, though they comprehended not the full import of their own words, "Lord, evermore give us this bread!" There cannot be a more suitable petition for ourselves to offer up: only let us understand and feel its meaning. Who is not auxious to preserve life? What immense pains are taken to procure that sustenance which merely supports the body! And shall we not be solicitous to gain a happy existence beyond the grave? Are we told that God has graciously made provision for this very end in the Gospel of his Son? And shall we not, instead of proudly and petulantly quarrelling with it, seriously inquire into its nature, and the method in which the benefit may be conveyed? Such a disposition, surely, becomes our character and situation. Let us hear, then, the further instructions of Jesus on this most interesting subject.

He declared explicitly, and without reserve, that he himself is that spiritual food on which our everlasting salvation depends; that by faith alone the blessing is obtained; and that the believer, in a sincere application to him, shall be delivered from those carnal desires which can never be satisfied, and shall

find his soul contented and delighted in him. Still he observed that many of those, who then saw him with their eyes, and had the best opportunity of examining his pretensions, contemptuously rejected the gracious offer. How shall this be accounted for? The true reason is assigned by our Lord. In our fallen and depraved state, such is our natural blindness, pride, and love of the world, that we are all unwilling to accept the salvation provided, by submitting to Jesus, and fixing our whole reliance upon him. Yet, that the glorious plan of redemption may not be defeated by our folly and perverseness, God hath secured a people for himself by his own covenant; and these, under the strong influence of his Spirit, abandon their opposition to Jesus, and bow before him with an unreserved subjection, thankful to partake of mercy in the appointed way. We adore that power, which hath wrought effectually in all them that be-While we admire the change, we confess and praise the free and sovereign grace of our God, which hath produced it.

But, lest this high and mysterious doctrine should be abused, or any humble penitents be discouraged, Jesus also declared his readiness to receive the applications of all who come, in all possible circumstances, and solemnly pledged his word that no objection whatever should prevail against them. This he confirmed by remarking that the final salvation of his people was the very end for which he had left the glory of heaven, and that it was also the grand object of his Father's counsels. On this ground he instructed them to expect from him the completion of their happiness in an everlasting state, and promised, again and again, that, though their bodies must go down to the dust, the grave should not detain them for ever, but that his arm would rescue them from death at the last day. Will not these assurances suffice us? Jesus possesses all fulness of grace for the recovery

of them that are lost. The invitation is sent to all, without exception: the offer is freely made to those who sincerely desire it; and all obstructions are removed but those which sinners themselves obstinately continue to throw in the way. What more do you wish for than a favourable acceptance? Why then do you remain at a distance from him, since he bids you to draw nigh, and engages to give you a cordial welcome? There is no decree which can exclude you from his mercy, if only you will submit to his proposals. His hand is stretched out to communicate his blessings; and his bowels yearn with compassion toward every poor supplicant who is humbled at his feet.

Jesus having spoken in high terms of his descent from heaven, and of the benefits to be derived from himself, the Jews, who were not acquainted with his divine extraction, and supposed him to be no more than the son of Joseph, his reputed father, began to cavil at his expressions. To silence their objections, and turn their attention to themselves, he replied to

the following effect :-

"Instead of indulging a captious disposition, seriously consider your own awful circumstances, and implore direction and assistance from above. For, such is the natural ignorance and perverseness of man in his fallen state, that he cannot be induced to seek or accept salvation in my name, but by the powerful operation of God upon his mind. Your own prophets have instructed you to ask and expect this very influence; and every one who has obtained it will acknowledge my claims, and yield me an unfeigned submission. In this way only my blessings are to be secured. Mistake me not, as if the Father would manifest himself in a visible manner: He speaks to you by him who is come from his immediate presence; and I, his faithful Witness, declare with the most solemn and repeated asseverations, that he,

who places his whole affiance upon me, is received' into the divine favour, and possesses a sure title to

eternal happiness.

"I am, therefore, that bread, which alone can afford true sustenance to your souls. How far superior to the manna by which your ancestors were supported! That was the means of preserving their existence in this world only for a short season; whereas the spiritual food which I propose will effectually secure you from perishing for ever. I myself am that food, of which the manna was a faint and imperfect representation: I came down from the highest heavens to communicate everlasting life to all those, throughout the whole world, who by faith shall partake of the sacred provision. For this very purpose I have assumed a human body, which I shall shortly offer up as an expiatory sacrifice, to rescue sinners from deserved ruin, and procure for them the possession of endless felicity."

Declarations so strong, so new, and mysterious, excited various sentiments in the minds of the Jews, who, therefore, began to dispute with each other concerning them. Through their carnal and perverse dispositions they could not comprehend how Jesus could "give them his flesh to eat." Probably most of them were disposed to deride the doctrine as altogether absurd. But he proceeded to confirm it by the most express and vehement assertions, without deigning to answer every cavil which a proud objector

might bring.

"However you may scorn the warning, I solemnly assure you that you are totally destitute of real spiritual life, unless you be quickened by believing on the Son of man, as suffering and dying for you\*. He

<sup>\*</sup> It would be doing the utmost violence to language to explain our Lord's expressions in any other sense than as referring to his intended sacrifice of himself. If he be no more than a teacher of virtue, and if he save us only by his good instructions, with what

surrenders up his body to the most violent tortures, and consents to shed his blood; and the benefits of this atonement will be communicated to you through faith. As the common food of your bodies must be received, that it may afford the necessary sustenance, so must you feast upon the sacrifice which my death will make, in order to derive from it true nourishment and vigour to your souls. The man who thus maintains an habitual regard to me, as his grand and sole support, 'who eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood,' possesses the principle of immortal life within him, and I engage to raise his very dust from the grave in a glorified state. He is furnished with an entertainment more delightful than the most sumptuous provisions can be to the senses. He is joined to me by a mysterious and inseparable union, which even resembles that of the eternal Father and the incarnate Son, and by virtue of which his soul shall be sustained and invigorated, through the constant communications of the Spirit. So far, then, does the heavenly manna surpass, in its excellent effects, that miraculous food which was granted to your progenitors in the wilderness. That imparted a be-

propriety of speech could be talk of giving his flesh to eat, and his blood to drink? This figure, doubtless, must be understood as representing his death, and our salvation as resulting from it, agreeably to those other declarations of the Scriptures, which ascribe our redemption to his blood. Allowing the reference to his atonement, whole appears consistent, and demands our most serious regard; but otherwise it must be thought strange and incongruous.

The Lord's supper was not at this time instituted; and therefore, though many of the expressions may be properly accommodated to that sacrament, which is an emblematical representation of the flesh and blood of Christ given to us as our spiritual food and sustenance, yet we are not warranted in drawing any conclusions from the passage before us with respect to the efficacy of that ordinance. These who communicate by faith do indeed eat the flesh and driok the blood of Christ, and they are vitally united to him. But the bare participation of the outward elements proves not a believing application to the Saviour, nor does it necessarily implant or increase the divine principle of life in the soul.

nefit comparatively mean in its nature, and short in its continuance; but this, which is now exhibited, will secure life and happiness of the most exalted kind,

and durable as eternity."

Such was the purport of our Lord's address to the Jews, and it is equally interesting to us as it was to them. Have we seriously considered it, and the important doctrines it involves? What impressions, then, are produced in our minds? Are we, like them, disposed to murmur, because Jesus claims such an exalted dignity? Or are we inclined to enter into curious speculations, and dispute against the plain assertions of the Bible, because they contain some things which baffle our comprehension? How presumptuous is such a spirit! Rather let us consider our blindness and extreme depravity, and suspect our own conclusions. Let us fervently implore those divine influences which God hath promised, and which the wisest and best of men continually need. Our understandings must be illuminated, truly to discern the appointed method of salvation in the Gospel; our carnal prejudices and affections must be subdued, that our objections against it may be effectually silenced; and our wills must be brought under a holy bias, that we may yield a cordial compliance.

Jesus is exhibited as the heavenly manna, which alone can nourish our souls to life eternal: Have we made use of him in this character? He condescended to be made "partaker of flesh and blood," that, dying in our nature, he might expiate our guilt: Have we fixed our regard upon him as our atoning sacrifice? It is solemnly declared, that, without a real participation of Christ by faith, we must remain in a state of spiritual death: Have we been sufficiently aware of the absolute necessity of believing? It is not enough that we give a cool assent to this fact, that Jesus hath died for us; but we must place our whole reliance upon him, and expect pardon, peace, and everlasting

glory, as obtained for us by his blood: Do we constantly maintain such a temper of mind towards him-Great and blessed are the effects of this humble and cordial application to the Saviour: Can we testify of their reality and excellence? Do we daily feed on the sacred sustenance here provided for us, and find in it the most exquisite delight? Are we sensible of any communion between Jesus and our own souls? And do we derive from him refreshment when we are weary, strength when we faint, and comfort when we are oppressed with troubles? If this be our case, we may rejoice in the confidence that he will bring us forth at the general resurrection with triumph and exceeding joy, and grant us a sure abode in his own glorious.

presence for evermore.

Such a free declaration of the mysteries of faith, and especially such a particular application of them to the consciences of the hearers, will generally excite offence; nor should the ministers of Christ be surprised at that effect, when they observe the reception which their Master met with. Many, even of his professed friends and disciples, began to cavil at his doctrine as harsh and unintelligible. He perceived their inward dissatisfaction, and replied to the very objections which they were afraid to utter. He intimated that he should soon return to heaven, from whence he had come down; and that his ascension, which might puzzle them as much as what he had asserted, would prove the justice of his claims. To prevent their abuse of the subject, he guarded them against a literal acceptation of his words, and directed them to the spiritual sense, in which alone they could be understood with profit. But he remarked, that, as he had been aware of their secret unbelief from the very first, he had insisted on divine influences, as necessary to remove the opposition of their hearts against them.

From that time, many, who had long followed him,

perceiving, probably, that their hypocrisy was detected, totally withdrew, and returned no more. Nav, such was the desertion, that it might seem as if the very twelve were staggered, and ready to depart. Jesus, therefore, called upon them to declare explicitly whether they would abide with him or no, that so their service might not appear to be constrained, but voluntary. The most distant proposal, however, of apostatizing from the Saviour, will ever strike the sincere believer with horror. Accordingly, Peter stood forth, as the mouth of the Apostles, maintaining their immoveable attachment to him, and steadfast dependence upon him for eternal life; rejecting, also, with fixed resolution, the thought of forsaking him, as big with misery and ruin. This was, indeed, a good confession. Yet, that they might still exercise a holy jealousy, and not be shaken in their minds by what would soon take place among themselves, he intimated that even in their small company, which he had selected for his own peculiar society, there was one person who possessed so malignant a disposition, as to resemble the devil himself. Ah! what terror, what distressing inquiries, must this excite among them!

Is it any objection, then, to the Christian church at the present day, that it contains many unsound members? False-hearted professors are to be expected at all times; but, in general, some temptation or other will occur, which will manifest their insincerity. Frequently they are offended by the plain dealing of their ministers; and it is no wonder that they depart from those who suspect them of hypocrisy. How awful is their case! "It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness\*." May the example awaken the attention of all who bear the Christian name! Happy those who are preserved unshaken, in the midst of numerous apostates. We

ask, then, of what kind is your attachment to Jesus? "Will ye also go away?" Are you, "who seemed to be pillars, moved from your hope?" You must, indeed, be left to your own choice; but we entreat you to form that choice deliberately, with a full view of all the consequences before you. If you depart from Christ, to whom can you betake yourselves? Is there any other refuge? Are "the words of eternal life" to be found any where besides? We exhort you, then, that, whatever difficulties may arise, you would not "draw back unto perdition," but "with purpose of heart cleave unto the Lord"

## JESUS CHRIST.

## SECT. 21.

Jesus replied to the cavils of Pharisees—cautioned the people against them—tried and commended the faith of a woman of Canaan—wrought many cures—fed four thousand by a miracle—opposed by Pharisees and Sadducees—restored sight to a blind mon at Bethsaida—declared his character, and foretold his passion, to his disciples, requiring them also to suffer with him.

THOUGH we are informed of many minute occurrences in the life of Jesus, yet many are concealed from us. We are not told whether he was present at the celebration of the passover, which succeeded the transactions recorded in the preceding section. But it is probable that, at that season of national concourse, various reports of Him, who engaged universal attention, were carried from Galilee to Jerusalem, and that these excited the envious displeasure of the public and most distinguished teachers of religion. It is certain, however, that many of that description, the Scribes and Pharisees, went down from the city, and, as it is likely, to Capernaum, though at a considerable distance, for the express purpose of collecting some grounds of accusation, or of bringing him into discredit with the people \*. These men, with all their pretences to sanctity, were the most violent opposers of the Saviour, and were evidently actuated by the basest motives in their conduct towards him. They discovered great zeal by taking so long a journey; but it was in a bad cause.

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xv. 1-20. Mark vii. 1-23.

Nor is it uncommon for those who resist the truth to be at immense pains and expense for the accomplishment of their purposes, and even to suppose that they are "doing God service," at the very time they are

filled with enmity against him.

Persons so disposed will seldom be at a loss for objections. Something or other, in the most exemplary behaviour, will appear censurable to the envious and malicious eye. What cause of complaint, then, did these insidious adversaries find against the holy Jesus? They upbraided him with the contempt which his disciples showed for their traditions in eating without first washing their hands. How ridiculous and how palpable was their hypocrisy, who laid such stress on outward purifications, and perceived not their need of inward sanctity! Men are ever prone to depend on a strict observance of rites and ceremonies, even of their own invention, and to substitute them for "the power of godliness," or to imagine that these will compensate the neglect of the most express moral injunctions. Jesus, therefore, convicted them of their glaring inconsistency in preferring their superstitious institutions to the absolute precepts of God. He produced one instance, in which they virtually abrogated the fifth commandment; for they excused those, who, through a false pretext of piety, and of devoting their substance to God, refused to relieve their aged parents in distress. They accounted it sufficient to say, "We have bound ourselves by a vow to give our money to the treasury, or some sacred use, and are therefore freed from the obligation of contributing to the support of our father or our mother."

It is indispensably required that we "learn first to show piety at home, and to requite our parents; for that is good and acceptable before God \*." We cannot, therefore, credit their professions of religion, who violate so plain and strict an injunction; nor can any

sacrifices to God, however costly, be accepted in lieu of this important duty. Yet in many such ways did these corrupt teachers flatter their deluded followers. Our Lord observed that their vile dissimulation was accurately described by one of their own prophets. For, like those of old, they "drew near to God with their mouth, and with their lips did honour him, but removed their heart far from him \*." And do none of modern times resemble them? Have we not those. who with a rigorous exactness insist on the particular distinctions of their own party, and institutions of merely human authority, while they allow themselves to transgress, in various instances, the eternal rules of righteousness, and suppose that their ceremonial scrupulosity or religious zeal will be a sufficient vindication of their conduct? Ah! what will avail the most specious pretences to devotion before that God, who "desireth truth in the inward parts?" "In vain do we worship him," if we offer him only the service of the lips, or attempt to substitute any observances instead of that holy obedience which he requires.

This was a proper occasion (and Jesus therefore embraced it) to warn the people not to be misled by such ignorant expounders of the law, and to show them that the depravity of the heart is the grand source of impurity, which renders us defiled in the sight of God. The Pharisees, offended with his plain reproofs, and confounded in their designs, had gone away in disgust. On that account, the disciples in private expressed their fears for the consequence; but he bad them not to be disturbed by those perverse opposers of the truth, inasmuch as both they, and their infatuated followers, would soon be overwhelmed

with final and remediless destruction.

It is an awful case when those who know not the way to heaven undertake to be public instructors. How fatal the effects to themselves and others! The

<sup># 1</sup>sa. xxix. 13.

deceived and the deceiver, however they may flatter and be flattered, shall perish together. Let us not, therefore, blindly and implicitly submit to the opinions and dictates of men, though they may bear a respectable character, or even fill the highest stations in the church; but let us form our judgment, not from human decisions, but from "the law and the testimony," since, whoever may be our teachers, we must answer for ourselves before the bar of God.

The declarations of our Lord were not well understood even by his own disciples. Having reproved them, therefore, in secret, for their dulness of comprehension, he affirmed in plainer terms that the heart is the seat and source of all moral pollution, that the food which is received for the proper nourishment of the body brings no defilement upon the soul, but that the man is rendered unclean and offensive before God only in consequence of his inward depravity, and that which proceeds from it. This is a doctrine which calls for deep humiliation and constant circumspection. It is easy to eat with clean hands, but would that purge the conscience? Ah! "Who can say, I have made my heart clean; I am pure from my sin \*?" According to the description which Jesus here gave, our fallen nature is so fruitful of evil, that it puts forth, as its common produce, all manner of impurity. Hence we are taught to account for the various kinds of iniquity in the world. Corrupt reasonings, irregular desires, sensual affections, lewdness, violence, dishonesty, avarice, malevolence, treachery, envy, profaneness, pride, and folly, have but one and the same origin: "they come from within." What then shall we think of the fountain which sends forth such filthy streams? How suitable is the confession of Job, "Behold, I am vile!" How exactly adapted to our case is that gracious promise of the new covenant, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean:-a new heart

<sup>\*</sup> Prov. xx. 9.

also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within

you \*."

Jesus, withdrawing from the observation of his malicious enemies, went into the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon, which was a remote part of the land t. Here, for proper reasons doubtless, he sought to conceal himself, but found it impracticable. He was soon discovered, and applied to for relief; but his visit is distinguished only by one little occurrence, which exhibits a character very opposite to that we have seen in the Pharisees. A poor distressed woman, not " of the stock of Israel," but descended probably from the ancient Canaanites, is here produced as a surprising instance of the rich grace of God: and it is likely too that her case was intended to intimate that mercy would shortly appear for the outcasts of the Gentiles. She had heard of the wonderful works of Jesus, from which, it should seem, she believed him to be the very Saviour whom the Jews were taught to expect from the family of David. Under this conviction she had recourse to him, in behalf of her beloved daughter, who was grievously afflicted with a demoniacal possession. She implored his kind interposition for her child, and urged her request with peculiar ardour.

The case was truly pitiable: but the behaviour of Jesus on this occasion was somewhat singular. We have hitherto observed him attentive to every cry of distress, and ready to render his assistance wherever it was solicited. But now he appeared totally regardless of the importunate supplicant, and returned no answer to her prayer. After some time, the disciples interceded for her, perhaps through real compassion, or being wearied with her incessant cries. Yet even this application seemed to meet with an absolute refusal, because the immediate objects of his commission were "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and not \* Ezek- xxxvi. 25, 26. + Matt. xv. 21—29. Mark vii. 24, &c.

"sinners of the Gentiles." What, then, could be alleged in her behalf? She determined not to give up her petition, but rather to press it with greater earnestness, though she had nothing to plead but her misery. She cast herself at his feet, in adoration of his power and grace, exclaiming, with evident expressions of inward anguish, and yet of entire reliance upon him, "Lord, help me." Still the Saviour appeared deaf to her entreaties, and even to reject her with contempt; for he replied, that the Jews, as children of the family, had a prior claim to his regard, and that it would be improper to cast their bread to "the dogs;" such being the low estimation in which the Gentiles were held.

From this severe repulse we might have considered her case as desperate; but she, with unshaken dependence, "against hope believed in hope." Her difficulties increased her ardour, so that she turned the very objections urged against her into an argument in her own favour Allowing the justness of our Lord's allusion, and that she deserved to be treated no otherwise than the dogs, she begged permission to gather some crums under the Master's table, which the children would not use; intimating that, as his grace was so large, like the provisions of a rich entertainment, some small portion of it might be extended to her, worthless as she was, without injury to his peculiar people.

We might possibly accuse the Saviour of acting with rigorous cruelty towards this poor woman; but the close of the narrative unfolds the reasons of his conduct. Though for some time he appeared unrelenting and inexorable, yet at length his compassion broke forth; and then it was found that he had withheld from her the desired mercy only that he might exercise her faith, for its further increase, and exhibit it to public view for the instruction and encouragement of others. When, therefore, she had given

full proof of her unfeigned humility, and firm reliance upon him, he no longer frowned, but granted her petition in the most gracious manner: he declared his warmest approbation of her principles, and assured her of the perfect and instantaneous recovery of her

daughter.

What, then, do we learn from this incident? We hear of Jesus; but do we believe him to be "the Son of David," the "Lord," who can "have mercy on us?" Have we no request to make, no blessing to implore from him? Let us pray with importunity, and take no denial. Perhaps he may deal with us as he did with the woman of Canaan, by seeming to disregard our distress, and to reject our suit with disdain. But let not this apparent neglect deter us: though repulsed again and again, let us renew our application with fresh ardour, and doubt not a happy issue. He may require us to wait long for the very mercy which he means to bestow. In the mean time, we are to manifest our deep contrition, and the strength of our confidence in his power, faithfulness, and love. Nav. though our guilt and depravity may be urged against us, as rendering us unsuitable objects for the Saviour's notice, we may solicit him the more carnestly to glorify himself in our deliverance. But, ah! how much impatience do we discover! How hardly do we bear the least delay! How soon do we give up our expectation in despondency, as if "the mercy of God were clean gone for ever, and his promise had failed for evermore!" How wretched, then, would be our condition, if he should treat us according to our own unbelieving apprehensions!

Jesus, having left the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon, came near to the sea of Galilee, where he ascended a mountain, probably for the purpose of instructing the multitudes who followed him. Here the case of one deprived entirely of his hearing, and almost of his speech, was submitted to him; nor was

his help implored in vain. Devoutly looking up in prayer, and then pronouncing the word with peculiar majesty, he instantly restored the obstructed faculties to their proper functions. That he might avoid ostentation, or that he might not provoke the malice of his enemies, he desired the matter to be concealed from public notice; but the cure appeared so wonderful, that it was soon proclaimed abroad, and all expressed their admiration of his character, saying,

" He hath done all things well."

Nor was this the only miracle which he performed there. Many other infirm and diseased persons were brought and cast at his feet, who excited his pity, and experienced his power to heal\*. These astonishing events could not but make a deep impression on the minds of the people, who therefore "glorified the God of Israel" for his gracious interposition. And shall we hear of them with a careless indifference? Shall we not be induced, from such proofs of the strength and mercy of our Redeemer, to trust, and love, and praise, and serve him? Shall we not perceive herein the performance of ancient promises, and bless God, who "hath remembered his holy covenant, and raised up an horn of salvation for us?"

The dignity of Jesus was displayed in other instances. Again he put forth his creative power, as on a former occasion, to supply the necessities of those who attended his ministry. Moved with compassion for the people, who had continued with him three days together, and were then quite destitute of food, and many of them at a distance from their own homes, he furnished a table for them in the open fields. He directed his disciples to impart to them their own provisions. These were seven loaves and a few small fishes; but, poor as the stock was, it was so increased in the distribution, that four thousand persons, besides women and children, were fed

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xv. 30, &c. Mark viii. 1-10.

and satisfied. The remains of this miraculous feast, as of the former, exceeded the original store, seven baskets of fragments being gathered up. He has afforded us sufficient encouragement, surely, to depend upon him for our daily bread. Only let us follow him in the way of duty, and he will not suffer us to "want any good thing." He "giveth food to all flesh;" nay, "the earth is his, and the fulness thereof;" so that he can, without difficulty, supply all our need. He has instructed us also, we perceive, to be frugal in the midst of plenty, and not to lavish, by an useless profusion, what his bounty bestows. In every case it is proper to "gather up the fragments, that

nothing be lost."

Having dismissed the multitude, he crossed the sea to the coasts of Magdala. Here a fresh attack was made upon him by a company of Pharisees and Sadducees united, who wished to insnare him \*. These men were as repugnant to each other in their principles as possible, the former being superstitious in the extreme, the latter perfectly licentious; but they came together to tempt Jesus. We see that persons of opposite tempers, of different sentiments, and of adverse parties, who cordially hate one another, can lay aside their animosities for a season, and forget their mutual malevolence, that they may join their strength and interest in acting against Christ. These subtle antagonists, like modern infidels, objected to the sufficiency of his evidence, and demanded of him another sort of attestation than what he had vet given. They desired "a sign from heaven," intending, probably, some splendid appearance in the skies. But is it not the height of pride and insolence for sinners to prescribe unto God what measures of conduct he should pursue, what kind of a revelation he should afford them, or by what particular testimonies it should be confirmed? Men presumptuously despise

<sup>•</sup> Matt. xvi. 1-12. Mark viii. 11-21

and reject the plain and incontestable proofs by which he has evinced the truth of his Gospel, and arrogantly call for those which he has wisely denied, and which

would be ineffectual to convince them.

Many discover an acute discernment in their attention to worldly things, who betray the grossest ignorance and stupor in spiritual concerns. They will also transact their secular affairs with confidence, where they have nothing to depend on but mere conjecture, and yet hazard their eternal salvation while they are petulantly objecting to the infallible credentials of the holy Scriptures. Such was the case of those captious disputants who attacked the Saviour: and on this ground he reproved their inconsistency in forming an accurate judgment of the weather, and obstinately refusing to "discern the signs of the times." He then declared, with deep distress for their awful state, that no such evidence as they desired would be granted, except it were his own resurrection on the third day; and then he left them to themselves, departing to the opposite side of the lake. Let their case stand as a solemn admonition to those who study to invalidate revelation by their subtle arguments. Alas! while you are debating, Jesus may entirely withdraw himself from you, and give you up to corrupt reasonings, and confirmed obduracy of heart.

When they had crossed the sea, the disciples of Jesus were distressed to find that they had nearly exhausted their whole stock of provisions. Their Master, to turn off their attention to a more profitable subject, cautioned them to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees," intending thereby to guard them against the dangerous opinions of those false teachers, whom he had lately combated. But they were so anxious about their bodily sustenance, that they considered him only as directing them what bread they were to avoid. He reproved them,

therefore, very sharply, for their dulness of comprehension in spiritual things, and for their distrusting fears of wanting food to eat, after having twice seen, as they had done, thousands supported by a miracle. Do not most of our own painful apprehensions arise from our ignorance and unbelief, and from a forgetfulness of the Lord's gracious interpositions in our favour? Oh! what shame and confusion belong to us, because we have profited no more by our past

experience!

Jesus then declared explicitly that he meant to guard them against those corrupt doctrines of his opposers, which might be compared to leaven. How insinuating, how infectious, is error! How soon it spreads its influence, though often imperceptibly! Are we aware of the dangerous consequence of admitting it? Or do we foolishly imagine that all opinions are equally safe? Are there no fatal mistakes, in our own days, of which we should be suspicious? Yes, there never was a time when such a caution was more necessary. Take heed, then, that ye be not "carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive\*."

Jesus came to Bethsaida, where he was requested to extend his compassion to a blind man †. He readily consented; and yet he chose not to perform the miracle within the confines of the town, nor would he suffer the person to return thither, to publish his case; which might be intended as a mark of his displeasure against the unbelieving inhabitants. Many of the astonishing effects of his power and grace at this time also are purposely concealed from the observation of sinners, who would be disposed to treat them with contempt and derision. But the day is approaching when all his wonderful works, and the excellency of his character, shall be made known to

<sup>\*</sup> Eph. iv. 14. + Mark viii. 22-26.

the assembled universe, to the unspeakable joy of faithful people, and the confusion of his enemies.

When he had withdrawn the man to a little distance from the city, he restored his sight, though in a gradual manner. At the first touch of the Saviour, some faint glimmerings of light were conveyed to the darkened eyes, so that things were perceived very obscurely, and men appeared "as trees walking." But, upon the second touch, every object was seen distinctly. In each one of his miracles, Jesus exhibited his divine perfections: but he did not confine himself to a particular mode of operation. In some instances, we apprehend, the full blaze of day was suddenly poured in upon the blind; but here was a regular advance from one degree of clearness to another. It is the same in spiritual concerns. He alone "giveth light and understanding to the simple;" but the methods of his grace are different in different persons. We must not dictate to him, nor set up the case of any Christian as a standard to which that of all others must be accommodated. Some are instantaneously "called out of darkness into marvellous light;" whilst many attain, by a slow progress, to the knowledge of the truth. The least measure of divine illumination is an earnest for good. It is like the twilight of the morning, which announces the rising of the sun. Though much obscurity, therefore, may attend your present views, be encouraged to wait upon the Saviour, in hope of receiving a more distinct perception. "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day \*."

Jesus now changed his situation, and betook himself to Cesarea-Philippi, in the northern extremity of Judea †. In that neighbourhood, being retired with his disciples, he inquired of them what were the ge-

<sup>\*</sup> Prov. iv. 18.

<sup>+</sup> Matt. xvi. 13, &c. Mark viii. 27, &c. ix. 1. Luke ix. 18-27.

neral sentiments of men concerning him. When informed that he was thought to be either John the Baptist, or some one of the ancient prophets, who was risen from the dead, he urged them to declare their own opinion of his character. To this there could be no other answer from his own attendants than what Peter immediately returned in the name of the rest, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." The confession was explicit, decided, and ingenuous; and Jesus pronounced the favoured Apostle who made it peculiarly blessed, as having received his knowledge, not by his natural abilities, or any human aid, but by divine communication. Then having asserted the infallible security of his church against all assaults of the powers of darkness, he promised to use Peter as a principal instrument in building that sacred edifice, and settling the concerns of his government. This amounted to a clear and explicit avowal that he was indeed the Saviour, possessed of supreme authority; but it passed only in private; and, from motives of prudence, he charged them not to divulge the matter till the proper season.

What are our conclusions respecting the extraordinary Character before us? Do we know him to be the Christ? Let us not presume on our own sagacity, the advantages of education, or any assistance from men, but implore the divine influence upon our minds, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him \*." Or are we grounded on the only sure foundation, "the Rock," which cannot be moved? Then let us exult in our high privileges; and, trusting to the promise, let us defy the fiercest attacks of our most malicious

enemies.

Jesus, having expressly acknowledged his real cha-\* Eph. i. 17. racter, began to speak to his disciples with less reserve concerning himself, and the particular means by which he should accomplish redemption for his people. He, therefore, plainly foretold his approaching sufferings, death, and resurrection. But such a Saviour they had not looked for; and the declaration staggered their faith. Peter, in particular, with his usual forwardness, dared to object to the scheme, as unworthy of his Master, and to dissuade him from it. This brought upon him a sharp rebuke, for he had evidently betrayed very low and carnal conceptions of the kingdom of Christ, and appeared even as an accomplice of Satan, in opposing his Lord's designs. Let us seek for proper views of the way of salvation. If Peter was acting a diabolical part, when he tempted Jesus to relinquish the end for which he came into the world, let us be well established in this fundamental article of our creed, that "we have redemption through his blood," and that "he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself \*."

From this circumstance Jesus was led to address, not his disciples only, but the multitude at large, on the necessity of being willing to suffer with him. Let us attend to his solemn declarations; for they concern ourselves. Do we profess a regard to him? He exhorts us to enter upon a strict course of self-denial, and to submit to extreme difficulties, even to martyrdom itself, in his cause. We must testify a grateful sense of his love, and a pure desire to promote his glory, by sacrificing ease, interest, reputation, and life itself, when we are required, for his sake. An inordinate attachment to present enjoyments will ruin us for ever; but a cheerful renunciation of every thing dear and valuable upon earth, in the service of Christ, will be recompensed with eternal blessedness

hereafter.

Are any deterred, by such considerations, from \* Eph. i. 7. Heb. ix. 26.

following the Saviour? Then make your choice, and; if you please, prefer the world to him. Secure its best delights, and, if it be possible, possess the whole of its pomps, its dominion, or its pleasures: what will you have gained? Can you estimate your profit, when you shall be rejected of God, and your souls lost, beyond the power of recovery, for ever? Is there any equivalent to be offered, by which you could purchase a release from hell, or even a mitigation of its torments? And are your immortal spirits in danger of perishing? Yes: "the Judge standeth before the door;"-" the Son of man shall come," with all the glory of his divine majesty, and with the whole retinue of heaven; and you must appear at his tribunal, to receive "according to your works." What, then, have you to look for at his hands, if you have opposed his cause, or, through the base principle of fear or shame, have declined the profession of his Gospel, or the society of his people? Think you that he will then own you, and number you among his saints? No: he will separate you from the company of those to whom you durst not avow an attachment upon earth; he will reject you with abhorrence, and consign you to a state of unutterable confusion, torment, and despair.

Such was the purport of our Lord's solemn admonitions; and in the same manner should sinners of the present day be warned. Perhaps the objection might be raised, If he were indeed of that exalted dignity which he represented, why did not his glory immediately appear? And it might be with a view to obviate the difficulty that he assured the persons around him that some of them should not die till they had seen a grand exhibition of his majesty, which might be considered as the commencement of his government. Some have supposed that this referred to his transfiguration, which soon followed; but it has more generally been explained of that remarkable

display of his power which took place in the destruction of Jerusalem, to the overthrow of his enemies, and the establishment of his church. That event he frequently described as his coming; and it was an awful emblem of his future and more illustrious advent for the final judgment of the world.

His predictions have been in part fulfilled; and in due time, when his righteous purposes are effected, they will all have their full completion. He will be revealed in his glory, as he hath told us; "and every eye shall see him." How shall we stand before him? What is our hope and expectation? Does the prospect of his manifestation fill us with delight? For so it ought to do, if we be indeed partakers of his salvation. It is the privilege of his faithful people to look and long for his appearing, crying "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." But such as remain at enmity against him have abundant cause to dread "the day of the Lord." In vain will they call upon the rocks and mountains to cover them, and hide them from his face. They must be arraigned at his bar; and their everlasting doom shall be pronounced from his mouth.—May we find mercy of the Lord in that day, and enter with him into his kingdom for ever! Amen.

## JESUS CHRIST.

## SECT. 22.

Jesus was transfigured, and declared to be the Son of Goa'—expelled an evil spirit, which his Apostles could not—warned them of approaching sufferings—paid the sacred tribute by a miracle—suggested solemn cautions against ambition, offences, contempt of any the weakest believers, severity and revenge towards an offending brother.

The Lord Jesus Christ appeared upon earth in a state of profound humiliation, the brightness of his original glory being obscured by the infirmities of humanity, and the external meanness of his condition. His example, indeed, his preaching and his miracles, proved him to be not only superior to the children of men, but "the Lord from heaven." There were also certain occasions, on which his true dignity was displayed in a very signal manner. The following instance is of that kind; and it seems to have been intended, not for vain parade, but for important purposes to himself and others.

About a week after the solemn address to his disciples, which was last mentioned, he retired to a high mountain (supposed by some to be Mount Tabor), for the purposes of secret devotion \*. He selected three out of the twelve, Peter, James, and John, his favoured attendants, that they might be witnesses of a grand exhibition of his glory, as they soon afterwards were of his distressing agony in the garden of Gethsemane. In their presence, as he offered up his

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xvii. 1-13. Mark ix. 2-13. Lake ix. 28-36.

fervent supplications, he assumed a most magnificent appearance, putting off, for a season, "the form of a servant and the likeness of men," and discovering his proper character, while he shone with the lustre of divine majesty. His countenance became bright and dazzling, as the sun in the firmament; and such a splendour covered his whole body, that the rays, as it were, darted through his garments, which also were luminous and sparkling as the light itself. Two eminent persons, likewise, who had been honoured in his service upon earth, Moses and Elijah, then attended him from the world of spirits, in a glittering resplendent form, and conversed with him on the grand design of his incarnation, the sacrifice which he was shortly to make for the sins of mankind, by his crucifixion at Jerusalem.

A sight so wonderful might well overwhelm the three Apostles. At first they had fallen asleep through fatigue; but being awakened, probably by the exceeding brightness of the appearance, they beheld the astonishing spectacle, and heard the conclusion of the conference. Peter, in particular, experienced so rapturous a surprise upon the occasion, that he exclaimed, "Master, it is good for us to be here," and proposed to erect tabernacles for the accommodation of their Lord and his two illustrious attendants, as if he could have spent his life upon the mount, amidst such transcendent glory, and with such exalted company. But he scarcely understood the meaning of his own words.

This was not the whole. Immediately a shining cloud, as a token of the divine Presence, perhaps resembling the ancient Shechinah, overshadowed them, and impressed them with solemn awe; while a voice from heaven proclaimed Jesus to be the Son of the eternal Father, and the object of his supreme complacency, and required an earnest regard and an unfeigned submission to him. Here, then, was a clear revela-

tion and a near approach of the Deity. But was not the grand exhibition too much for human powers to sustain? Alas! such is our state of infirmity, and such the effect of guilt upon the conscience, that the most advanced saints in this world would feel some degree of terror if God were to manifest himself to them in his glorious majesty, though sweetly tempered with grace and mercy. If our eyes should behold the Lord of hosts, we could not but adopt the language of Job, " I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes ";" we could not help exclaiming, like the Prophet, "Wo is me! for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips +:" or we should say, as Peter, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord ‡." So these three distinguished disciples "fell on their face, and were sore afraid." But Jesus, who undertakes to introduce his people into the presence of God, and to give them confidence before him, immediately interposed for their support and comfort. He put his hands on them, and encouraged them to arise, and lay aside their fears.

The transfiguration was ended; the heavenly visitants disappeared; and Jesus, being left alone with his Apostles, charged them not to divulge what they had seen, till after his resurrection. Perhaps their account of it would not have been credited before that event, and it might have produced some dangerous consequences. It should seem that they expected Elijah's continuance among them, and were surprised at his being withdrawn; for it was commonly supposed, from Malachi's prediction, that he would return to dwell on the earth, to effect a general reformation, and thus prepare the way for the kingdom of Messiah §. But Jesus taught them that the prophecy had been already fulfilled in its spirit; John the Baptist, who resembled Elijah in his zeal and

<sup>\*</sup> Job. xlii. 6.

<sup>+</sup> Isa. vi. 5. § Mal. iv. 5, 6.

Luke v. 8.

habits of austerity, had appeared for those purposes, which were predicted.

And what impression does the narration of this singular vision make upon our minds? It is circumstantially related, and confidently attested, not only by three Evangelists, but by one of those who were eve-witnesses of it. St. Peter produces it as a strong proof that they had not "followed cunningly-devised fables," but that Jesus was indeed what they had heard him declared to be by a voice from heaven, "the Son of God \*." And are we receiving him as the Beloved of the Father? Do we admire, praise, and trust him? Are we also, as the Father, "well pleased" in him? Do we feel a holy complacency and delight in his mediation, as a sufficient ground of hope and confidence towards God? Do we hear him as our Teacher to instruct, our Saviour to comfort, and our Lord to command us? Then by faith we behold an unspeakable glory in him, though not that outward lustre, so dazzling to the bodily sight, upon the mount. Then we shall not only consider him as "the man Christ Jesus," but believe that the splendour of the divine Majesty resides in him, and we shall devoutly worship him as "our Lord and our God."

It is probable that the transfiguration was intended to animate and strengthen Jesus himself, who in his human nature might be ready to faint under the apprehension of his approaching sufferings, as well as to prevent his chosen companions from being staggered by the depth of his humiliation. They were, therefore, the better prepared to attend him in the garden of Gethsemane, and to stand by his cross on Mount Calvary. They beheld a token of his future glory, an emblem of that transcendent brightness which he should possess upon his return to heaven: and we consider it, also, as in some sort a representation of that magnificent and awful appearance, when, "being

<sup>\* 2</sup> Pct. i. 16-18. See also 1 John i. 1-3.

in the form of God," he shall come again "to judge the quick and dead," accompanied with a grand re-tinue, not merely Moses and Elijah, but "ten thousand of his saints." The prospect should cheer and revive your hearts, if indeed you are his faithful disciples. You shall be witnesses and partakers of his triumphant exaltation: " when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory \*." You likewise shall be transfigured, "You shall be like him, for you shall see him as he is t," and "shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of your Father ‡." Then it may be said in the highest sense, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." From that holy mount you will never be called down; and the glory, which is there to be revealed, " fadeth not away."

When Jesus returned to his other disciples, whom he had left behind, he found them engaged in disputation with the Scribes, who, probably, were endeavouring to subvert their faith §. Upon his appearance, the vast multitudes of people who surrounded them ran with eager joy to express their respect. But they were struck with amazement; and, though we are not acquainted with the cause, it is possible that this effect might be produced by some remaining lustre which they observed in his countenance; for thus the face of Moses shone when he descended from

Sinai.

Amongst the great numbers who flocked around him, one person in particular, under extreme anguish, solicited his aid. He brought his son, his only child, who, instead of being a comfort to him, was a spectacle of horror, afflicted with lunacy, convulsed with fits, and tortured in various ways through the possession of an evil spirit. The father, representing the case, kneeled as an humble supplicant at the feet of

<sup>\*</sup> Col. iii. 4. † 1 John iii. 2. † Matt. xiii. 43. § Matt. xvii. 14, &c. Mark ix. 14—33. Luke ix. 37—45.

Jesus, and cried, "Lord, have mercy on my son:if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us." In this very application the man discovered some degree of dependence; but doubt and hesitation seemed to be mixed with it: and perhaps his principles were shaken by the opposition of the Scribes, and by the failure of the disciples, who had tried in vain to effect the cure. Jesus, therefore, required a more decided testimony of his faith, and observed that no deliverances were too great to be expected in an humble reliance upon him. The poor petitioner, being instantly convicted of his weakness, exclaimed, with evident marks of distress, " Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." The confession was accepted, and the prayer granted. The Saviour did not even upbraid him with his distrust, but proceeded to perform his request. He rebuked and expelled the devil, who seemed unwilling to relinquish his hold, and, even in the act of departing, grievously tormented the unhappy patient. After suffering some violent agonies, the son was restored in perfect health to his rejoicing parent.

You also, who now come unto Jesus, should disclose the troubles of your mind, and "pour out your heart before him:" in every instance, it will be proper for you to cry, "Lord, have mercy on us." But beware of entertaining any fears or suspicions, which are dishonourable to his character. No question ought to be made, concerning his ability, or his disposition, to help. "Canst thou believe?" is the grand inquiry: for his blessings are communicated only to them who confide in him. Difficulties, perhaps, arise, which stagger you, and fill you with misgivings. Confess and lament this weakness before him, praying that he may pardon and remove it, and not withhold his favour, through displeasure at the sin. "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Nor should you entreat him for yourselves alone, but for your friend,

or your child in distress. In all circumstances, he

can extend the relief which you want.

The disciples, as we have intimated, in vain attempted to expel the demon: and at this they expressed their wonder, when they had retired with their Master. They had wrought many miraculous cures before, and, perhaps, for that very reason, were too self-sufficient, or had forgot their entire dependence upon him for all their success. At least in this instance there was a failure of their faith; and, accordingly, he taught them, that it was only by maintaining a constant, though feeble and doubting, reliance upon him, they could perform the most astonishing operations. He further observed, that it was necessary to implore divine assistance, especially on solemn occasions and in great difficulties, by a more than ordinary measure of devotion and humiliation.

We are not called to the same high office, or invested with the same powers, as the Apostles. But we have all, in our respective places, continual need of God's strengthening and supporting hand. In the view of our several duties and trials, we may see reason to cry out, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Perhaps our good endeavours have miscarried because of our unbelief. With what temper of mind have we set ourselves to combat our spiritual enemies? Shall we wonder that we have been defeated, or that our corruptions still retain their ascendancy, notwithstanding our opposition? For is it not true here, also, that the victory we seek cannot be obtained "but by prayer and fasting?"

From the mount of transfiguration Jesus passed through different parts of Galilee. There he sought opportunities of privacy, that he might open to his disciples, more fully than he had done before, his approaching sufferings, death, and resurrection. The subject had been repeatedly mentioned, but they were dull of apprehension, and unwilling to admit it. They still looked for temporal dominion, and therefore could not bear to hear of his losing his life in an ignominious and violent manner. They were distressed and confounded, and yet afraid to disclose their difficulties. He, however, enduring with much indulgence their ignorance, ambition, and unbelief, continued to suggest his cautions, that he might gradually correct their mistakes. The cross of Christ has ever been matter of offence, and is so in our own day. This humbling scheme is what a proud and carnal mind cannot relish; and therefore it is accounted "foolishness." We are infinitely indebted to the mercy of God, who has rectified our notions and subdued our prejudices, if we are brought to admire it, to trust and rejoice in it. For, after all the vain cavils of presumptuous men, it is "the power of God and the wisdom of God." But you, who are averse to this method of salvation, should consider that it is not for you to prescribe unto God. Submit implicitly to his gracious appointment, nor dare to quarrel with his terms. Beg of him to pardon your perverseness, and give you more clearly to comprehend what may for the present appear obscure or inconsistent.

When Jesus came to Capernaum, it was inquired by the collectors whether he did not usually pay the tribute; and his conduct upon that occasion was narrowly watched. Jesus discussed the subject in private with his apostle Peter. He argued that he, as the Son of God, might plead a peculiar exemption from bearing the expense of supporting his Father's house (for the levy was probably that for the service of the temple), and that this should be laid upon strangers rather than upon him. But, to avoid offence, and to guard against a dangerous abuse of his example, he agreed to discharge the claim. But whence was the money to be furnished? According to his directions, Peter cast a hook into the sea, and a fish, bearing in

its mouth a silver coin to the full amount of the tribute, presented itself as an easy prey, at the very time and place in which it was wanted. This extraordinary method of payment displayed his power and condescension: his condescension, in submitting to such a state of extreme poverty, though he was Lord of all, that he could not without a miracle produce the very small sum sufficient to answer the demand; and his power, inasmuch as all creatures were compelled to yield obedience to him, in whatever

way they were required.

Let us not then complain of our contracted circumstances, while we contemplate Jesus in so mean a condition; nor let us hesitate to trust ourselves under his care, when we see how easy it is for him to procure money for necessary uses. He has taught us to contribute cheerfully, in our respective stations, whatever may be needful for the support of religion and civil government. "Render, therefore, to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom \*." Withhold not from any their just or reasonable demands. If you profess to be followers of Jesus, you will feel the force of his motive, and study to give no offence. The fear of increasing the prejudices of the world against the Gospel will make you circumspect in this as well as in other instances of your conduct.

Our Lord, having called the twelve around him, in the house where he was retired, addressed them with all the affection of a father, instructing, warning, and reproving them, as might be most expedient, according to their circumstances †. He had overheard them debating upon the road, concerning the right of precedency in his kingdom; for, still expecting a temporal dominion, and being too much under the influence of an ambitious spirit, they were all eager to

<sup>\*</sup> Rom. xiii. 7.

<sup>†</sup> Matt. xviii. 1, &c. Mark ix. 33, &c. Luke ix. 46-48.

obtain the highest places of preferment. But, when he had inquired the subject of their dispute, and they seemed ashamed to avow it, he spoke to their secret thoughts, and suggested, that, to be truly honourable in his account, they must possess other dispositions, and excel in humility. At length they introduced the matter openly, finding that it was not concealed, and asked plainly, "Who is the greatest?" To this he replied, while he took an infant in his arms, that, except they were converted to God, and rendered meek, teachable, and free from designs of guile and aspiring views like little children, they would not only attain no exaltation, but have no share at all in his kingdom; and that the person, who discovered most of an unfeigued lowliness of mind, stood the highest in his favour. And are we duly sensible of the spiritual nature of our religion? Are we not aiming at worldly grandeur and pre-eminence, instead of attending to the frame of our souls? What have we known of real conversion of heart? Is not the very term treated with profane ridicule, as if the mention of it proved a man a visionary and an enthusiast? But, surely, if conversion were so absolutely necessary in our Lord's time, it cannot now, be dispensed with, however the idea may be scorned among us. Where shall we look for Christian humility? Do all, who pretend to be the disciples of Jesus, bear evident marks of a child-like simplicity, submission, and dependence? Or, rather, is not such a disposition derided as despicable meanness? How strange that those should retain the name of Christianity, who are ashamed of its peculiar excellencies and most essential attributes! Do we judge of our growth in grace by the criterion here laid down? Do we become more and more abased in ourselves? Have we a deeper sense of the malignity of sin, and of our extreme depravity? Do we learn to trust more unreservedly to the help of God, and daily to maintain

faith in the Redeemer, more firmly, for every blessing? Thus only shall we prove our advancement in the divine life, and our progress towards heaven.

Jesus, having mentioned one distinguishing part in the character of his people, proceeded to show what a tender regard should be paid to them. He declared, that whatever favour was done unto any of them, though it were one as feeble as the infant in his arms, he would consider it as done unto himself: but that a contempt of them, or a deliberate purpose to turn them out of the way, or interrupt them in their course, would be followed by a punishment infinitely more tremendous than any temporal destruction. Alas! how many such stumbling blocks are laid before us, as not only obstruct the weak, but prove fatal to the souls of thousands? So circumstanced, indeed, as we now are, these things are to be expected: by inevitable consequence they will occur. But how provoking to God! how terrible the effects! "Wo unto the world, because of offences! Wo to that man by whom the offence cometh!"

Would you avoid the awful denunciation? Then beware, lest there be something in your temper and conduct which may be the means of seducing others, or prejudicing their minds against the truth of God. Attend to what the Saviour has suggested in his Whatever gratification or prosolemn exhortation. spect of gain may obstruct the great business of salvation, you must totally relinquish it, though as dear to you, and in your estimation as necessary, as a hand, a foot, or an eye. Do not hesitate because the mortification is painful. It were far better, surely, to suffer the severest operation, to cut off the hand or the foot, or to pluck out the eye, than expose yourselves or others to eternal misery. No inconvenience or distress, to which you can be called here, is to be compared to those endless torments which

are reserved for the ungodly. Does not the description excite a horrible dread, while it is expressly declared, three times together, that in hell "their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched?" The sacrifices under the Mosaic law were sprinkled with salt \*; in allusion to which it is asserted, that "every one," falling a sacrifice to the justice of God, "shall be salted with fire;" and this represents the fierceness and durable nature of those flames to which the impenitent will be doomed. Would you escape them? The direction is clear: " every sacrifice shall be salted with salt +;" that is, every one truly devoted to God, and whom he will accept, must be consecrated to his service by his grace, which alone can purify and preserve the soul. This is "the salt" which you must obtain; or else, notwithstanding your religious profession, you will be worthless and contemptible.

The subject being important, Jesus continued to enforce an affectionate regard to the least and meanest of his members. While he held the child in his arms, he observed, that we ought not to despise even such an infant, upon which the very angels are commissioned to attend: much less, then, should we disdain the weakest believers (represented by the babe), to whom the highest order of the exalted spirits before the throne of God continually minister. Nav, to rescue them from destruction was the end for which "the Son of man" came into the world. He is that "good Shepherd," who seeks the wandering sheep, and rejoices in its recovery, even more than in the rest of his flock, which are already secured within his fold. We, also, should possess a similar disposition; and, therefore, so far from obstructing the salvation of any soul, we should delight

in promoting it.

Even a Christian brother may sometimes act in-Lev. ii. 13. + See Bishop Hurd's Sermon on this text.

consistently, and we may suffer through his misconduct. But we are not therefore rashly to abandon him, or indulge a vindictive temper. We are immediately to attempt his restoration, first by private admonitions, then by the interference of a few common friends, and, if that method should be ineffectual, by the more public censures of the religious community to which we belong. It is only when every effort fails that we may proceed to the painful extremity, and renounce all fellowship with him. Perhaps this expedient may be salutary; at least it will be proper. And, that discipline might be maintained in his church, our Lord has assured us that the decisions of his ministers and people, acting in his name and from a regard to his glory, shall be ratified in heaven. Not only for the regulation of a Christian society, but for the encouragement of all to meet and offer their united prayers in a dependence upon him, he solemnly promised that their petitions should be granted, and their assemblies honoured with his own immediate presence. Even for the smallest companies the blessing is intended. "There," said he, "am I in the midst of them." How exalted is the language! How gracious the declaration! He can be no other than the omnipotent Jehovah, who "filleth heaven and earth," since he engages to manifest himself, in all the various places where his people meet, at the same moment of time. He speaks also in terms pe-culiar to the Deity, "I AM." Yet "as his majesty - is, so is his mercy." He will not be unmindful of them who seek him. Let them associate together in his name, professing their regard to him, and offer up their joint petitions, "with one mind and one mouth" pleading its merits, and they shall know that he is in the midst of them, by the strength and comfort of his Spirit. Surely the promise should enliven our affections, and enlarge our expectations in his service.

As our Lord had insisted on the manner in which dissensions between Christians should be healed, Peter took occasion to propose the inquiry, how often forgiveness should be extended to an offending brother, as if some limits should be affixed to the exercise of our patience and forbearance. But Jesus, in his reply, has taught us, that, if injuries should be multiplied against us without number, we should still be ready to pardon not merely "until seven times, but until seventy times seven;" and even that our lenity to others should be as unbounded as that of God is towards us. This astonishing compassion and grace of our God is represented in an affecting parable. He is the great King, who "takes account of his servants," and to whom we are indebted in a larger sum than we are able to compute. Should he rigorously demand payment, our case would indeed be desperate. Let us try the effect of an humble application to his mercy. He will not proceed in strict justice against us, if, under a deep conviction of our wretchedness, we cry "Lord, have patience with us." He will instantly and freely remit the whole claim. Has he done this for us? And do we not feel a grateful sense of his goodness? Or, where is the person, who, with the hope of having received such a gracious discharge from his Lord, can retain sentiments of anger and revenge against an offending brother, who implores forgiveness? This strange inconsistency is exhibited in the character of the unmerciful man, who experienced such clemency from his master, when his own debt was immense, and yet exacted from his poor fellow-servant, with extreme severity, the payment of a few paltry pence. So trifling are all the injuries, which we can possibly sustain from one another, compared with our manifold and heinous provocations against God. If then, in the warmth of our resentment, we conclude that our brother has no claim to our compassion, and we refuse to extend any mercy to him, what do we but pass sentence upon ourselves? The indignation of the Lord, who had shown so much tenderness, was roused against the inexorable wretch. "So likewise," said our divine Teacher, "shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

How tremendous is the thought, that a malicious, cruel, and revengeful disposition is odious in the sight of God, and, unrepented of, will bring down his heaviest displeasure! And how forcible an argument does it suggest for the exercise of mutual forbearance, candour, and love, among Christians! "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evilspeaking, be put away from you, with all malice. And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you\*."

<sup>•</sup> Eph. iv, 31, 32.

## JESUS CHRIST.

#### SECT. 23.

Jesus reproached by his kindred—went to the feast of tabernacles—taught in the temple—miraculously preserved from the rage of the people, and from the officers of the sanhedrim—appealed to concerning an adulteress—renewed his public instructions—answered various cavils—asserted his Deity, and only by a miracle escaped a violent death.

It was a striking proof of the condescension of Jesus, and no small part of it, that he "endured such contradiction of sinners against himself\*." That He, who "is Lord of all, should dwell in mortal flesh, was an instance of deep humiliation: yet he stooped still lower, in bearing the malicious insults and violent opposition of those, who were not only the creatures of his hands, but obnoxious to his wrath, and whom he might in a moment have confounded and destroyed for ever. He suffered their perverseness with unexampled patience, and laboured incessantly for their good. May his servants learn from him "to be gentle unto all men, and in meekness to instruct those that oppose themselves!"

It has been remarked that our Lord continued to preach in Galilee; and it is accounted for by an Evangelist, who observes that he declined spending much time in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, because of the murderous designs which were there formed against him †. At the approach of the feast of taber-

<sup>\*</sup> Heb. xii. 3.

<sup>+</sup> John vii. 1, &c.

nacles\*, though he intended to be present at the celebration of that solemnity, he delayed his journey for some days, that he might attract the less notice. But his brethren (which expression includes all those who were nearly related), knowing his constant practice, wondered at this delay, and, with an insolent taunt, desired him to take that opportunity of going to display his works at Jerusalem. They meant to insinuate that he courted popularity, and aimed at nothing more than the public applause. Never was any objection more groundless or more invidious than this. His whole deportment manifested a contrary disposition. But men with a malevolent heart are capable of the basest misrepresentations. There were unbelievers, we perceive, among the kindred of Jesus, and probably in the same house with him, who, though witnesses of his exemplary holiness and miraculous operations, derided and rejected him. They who dwell in a pious family, or are intimately connected with a person eminently religious, enjoy peculiar advantages for their own spiritual improvement; but, even in so favourable a situation, they may remain in ignorance and contempt of those principles, the excellency of which is continually before their eyes. We do not wonder, therefore, that the faithful servants of Christ are often shamefully calumniated by those who are nearly allied to them; especially as we observe such malignant reproaches cast upon their Lord and Master.

Jesus replied that he was aware how much hatred he had incurred by his severe reproofs, and, therefore, that he should not yet venture himself amongst his decided enemies. He further remarked, that this reason need not detain them, since their conduct

<sup>\*</sup> This was one of the grand annual festivals of the Jews, appointed in remembrance of their ancestors dwelling in tents, and kept for seven or eight days together in booths, which were built for that purpose. Lev. xxiii. 34.

was so agreeable to the spirit of the world, as to excite no disgust or malevolence. The observation accounts for all the violence of persecution which is raised against those who boldly condemn the sinful practices of their own times, and shows also that it may be avoided by a mean and servile compliance with the general sentiments and manners. Perhaps our Lord could not trust himself even in the company of his own relations; and therefore he followed them, after some days, with the greatest privacy. Had he neglected this service, he would, probably, have been censured as a despiser of religion; for there was an universal expectation of him at the festival, and, as he did not appear at the beginning, there was much inquiry made concerning him. It is evident, then, that he was regular in his attendance on divine ordinances; thus he "fulfilled all righteousness," and left a perfect example to his people. What resemblance of him do they bear, who neglect the sacred institutions or God's house? Do not their very excuses convict them of profaneness, indolence, or avarice? To tread in his steps, we must carefully observe the appointed times and solemnities of public worship.

It might be also to avoid ostentation, as well as danger, that Jesus travelled to Jerusalem in private. Perhaps even there he concealed himself upon his first arrival; while warm debates were held concerning him, some allowing his integrity, others condemning him as a deceiver, and none daring to avow an attachment to him. But, about the midst of the festival, he appeared in the temple, and delivered his holy instructions with an unshaken firmness and intrepidity, through a pure zeal for the honour of God, and compassion for the souls of the numerous congregation then assembled. The Jews immediately perceived such a depth of sacred knowledge as they could not account for, considering the meanness of his education: but he proceeded to declare that he

was invested with a commission from Heaven, and that his doctrine was not the fruit of human learning, or the deductions of reason, but a direct revelation from God. He observed that the evidences were such as would convince an honest inquirer, and that the man who was seriously disposed to do the will of God would certainly attain a right understanding of the truth, however obscure or absurd it might seem to others. As to himself, he maintained that he sought nothing but the divine glory, and therefore that they should receive him, at least, as no impostor.

The Gospel, then, which Jesus taught, demands our unfeigned regard, because it is a message from God. Herein he still preaches to us, as he did to the Jews of old. Let us examine whether we "know of the doctrine." Are we persuaded of its authority and excellence? Have we a clear perception of its grand design? And have we carefully traced its distinguishing lineaments? If otherwise, we should suspect in ourselves an unsoundness of heart, a determined love of sin, and a spirit of presumptuous disobedience to God. These are the chief causes of infidelity and ignorance where the truth of God is sent: and it is generally evident that men's difficulties and objections betray a perverse and unholy disposition.

Jesus, by a bold appeal, accused his hearers of transgressing the law of which they boasted; some he even charged with harbouring designs of violence against his person. They denied the imputation, and insolently reviled him for it, as if he were under the possession of the devil. He, however, continued to assert that their persecution was most unreasonable and malignant, since they made the cure of diseased and impotent poverty, which he had performed on the sabbath\*, a plea for slander, rage, and murder. He showed how inconsistent it was to condemn his miraculous work of mercy, which, in fact, broke not the

<sup>\*</sup> John v. 1-16.

law of the day, and on the same sacred season themselves to practise the rite of circumcision, out of regard to Moses, who had appointed it, and yet was not its original founder. Why should their decisions be regulated by appearances? Why would they not

form a just and impartial judgment?

Many of the people were impressed with an admiration of his courage, especially when they knew that there were serious intentions of destroying him; and vet they foolishly concluded that he could not be the Messiah, because his extraction seemed incompatible with that high character. To these captious adversaries he replied, that, notwithstanding their supposed acquaintance with him and his origin, he came to them. with an express and full commission from that God, of whom they were ignorant, and with whom he had the most intimate communications. Alas! how many deceive themselves in boasting of their clear perceptions of the divine nature, and their sincere regard to the true God, while they reject or pervert the Gospel! Their very objections to the scheme of salvation by Jesus Christ generally arise from gross misapprehensions, or a fixed hatred, of God's righteous perfections. Let us be willing, that He, who alone hath known the Father, should declare him unto us.

So pointed a reproof and such high claims were more than they could bear. They were filled with rage, and were only prevented from acts of violence by a strong impression upon their minds, which restrained their malice. It was not possible that they should have power to destroy him till the purposes of Heaven were accomplished. Yet there were many of the lower order who seemed convinced that he was indeed the Christ; for they argued rightly, that the promised Deliverer could not perform more astonishing operations than Jesus had done. These favourable dispositions in the people alarmed the great council of the sanhedrim, which was then assembled;

and officers were immediately sent to apprehend him. But the malevolent design was baffled. Jesus continued to preach, even before the face of those who were charged with a commission to seize him. He warned them that, notwithstanding their opposition, he should proceed in his work a little longer: that shortly, returning to the state of glorious exaltation which he had left, he should be removed beyond the reach of their violence; and that they would seek in vain to be admitted into his presence. How solemn the admonition! Alas! how few considered the time of their visitation! How few, in our own day, consider that Jesus, who waits upon them in the ministry of his word, will soon withdraw himself, that the gracious offers now made will never be renewed, and that an eternal separation must take place between them and that Saviour whom they despise! "Where He is, thither they cannot come."

While they were puzzled to comprehend his meaning, he proclaimed aloud the rich mercy of the Gospel, inviting the application of all who were truly desirous of spiritual blessings. To such persons he promised to dispense the abundant influences of the Holy Ghost, for their support and refreshment. He also described those precious emanations, as proceeding from believers, and blessing their numerous connexions, like streams which scatter wide their plenty. This wondrous, this encouraging address to the whole body of the people, was pronounced on the last day of the feast, at a time when it is probable the assembly was larger than usual; and when, as it is supposed, the officers of justice stood before him. On that day it was customary to fetch water from the fountain of Siloam, and pour it on the altar with great exulta-Perhaps, too, in testimony of this, they sung at the time that remarkable sentence, where the allusion gives life to the description of the Prophet, "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation\*." It is thought that upon this occasion Jesus stood on an eminence, and, exerting his voice, that he might be heard by the surrounding multitudes, directed their attention to himself, as intended to be represented in that ceremony, as "the fountain of living waters," communicating the most plentiful sup-

plies of grace to every thirsty soul.

To us, also, the same blessing is offered, the same kind invitation is given. His ambassadors still address us, with similar proposals, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters†!" The grand source, to which we are referred, remains inexhaustible as ever; nor is there any thing to obstruct our access except our own indifference or aversion. "Let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely‡." Have we any ardent desires for those spiritual benefits which Jesus confers? It is well if we be truly sensible of their excellence and importance. Let our application be made unto him without delay, and with earnest solicitation. He will not disappoint our wishes, but even exceed our largest expectations and conceptions; and perhaps the mercy which we receive may be conveyed to others also, through our means, for their effectual relief and salvation.

These surprising declarations of Jesus excited various debates among the people. Some were disposed to honour him as a Prophet, others to acknowledge him as the Christ; but, as they hastily concluded that he was born in Galilee, it was argued that he could not fulfil the ancient prophecies concerning the Messiah, and they were too careless or too bigoted to enter into further inquiries. The very men who were employed to apprehend him, and some of whom were disposed to take him by force, listened to his words, till, under the strongest impressions of admiration and reverence, they were unable to execute their purpose

<sup>\*</sup> Isa. xii. 3. See Bishop Lowth on that passage.

† Isa. lv. 1. 

‡ Rev. xxii. 17.

They returned without their prisoner, and were constrained to allege, in excuse for not fulfilling their commission, "Never man spake like this man." How easily can the Lord God overawe and confound his enemies! "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain." We have known many instances of those, who, unaccountably to themselves, have been suddenly obliged to relinquish their designs of violence, and even to plead the cause of persons whom they had vowed to destroy. Not a few have been brought to a state of penitence, under a sermon, while they were seeking objections, and forming malevolent intentions against the preacher.

The sanhedrim, however, were the more exasperated, and represented all, who favoured Jesus, as ignorant, deluded, and infatuated wretches, not worthy to be regarded. Nicodemus attempted to moderate their rage; but he met with a severe rebuke for the prudent advice which he suggested; and per-

haps the council broke up in confusion.

The evening approached, and Jesus retired, not to indulge in sensuality or indolence, nor even to obtain the necessary refreshment of sleep. He withdrew to the mount of Olives, at some little distance from the city, where he might give vent to the ardent affections of his soul in secret prayer. The night, therefore, as well as the day, was devoted to the service of God, with a view probably to the salvation of sinners, for whom he was most anxiously concerned. Let those, who minister in holy things, be instructed from him to mix the duties of private devotion with their public labours, if they wish to be supported and to prosper in their work.

Early in the morning he returned to the temple, and, not discouraged by the opposition he had met with, resumed his employment, teaching the people

<sup>\*</sup> Psal. lxxvi. 10. + John viii. 1, &c.

with the same freedom as before. His insidious adversaries also renewed their attempts with much vigilance and assiduity, though their former schemes were defeated. Some of the Scribes and Pharisees brought an adulteress before him, and desired his decision upon the case, whether she should be stoned, according to the Mosaic injunctions. Their intention was to reduce him to a difficulty, and, from his judgment, whatever it might be, to prefer a serious charge against him. Had he pronounced sentence upon her, they would probably have accused him as an enemy to the Roman government; or, if he had acquitted her, they might have calumniated him as subverting their law, and favouring the sin which she had committed. For some time he seemed to pay no regard to their question; but when they urged him to reply, he showed his knowledge of their hearts, and displayed his power as well as wisdom by confounding their purpose. His answer was, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her:" and it was such a pointed application to their consciences, and so forcibly impressed, that it obliged them to depart, and thus tacitly to acknowledge their own guilt. Immediately, the gracious Redeemer dismissed the poor criminal without condemnation; for he acted not as the civil magistrate, and would not pronounce her offence unpardonable: but he solemnly admonished her to sin no more. Who, then, shall presume to contend with Him? "He disappointeth the advices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise\*." But transgressors, even of the most atrocious kind, who tremble before him, need not despair of his mercy. Only let them remember his salutary caution, nor dare, in any future instance, to renew their wicked practices.

Jesus continued to deliver his instructions to the people, still maintaining his own divine character, and exhibiting himself as the author of all spiritual

<sup>\*</sup> Job v. 12.

blessings. Perhaps from the view of the sun, then breaking forth upon them, he took occasion to compare himself to that grand luminary, declaring that only by a regard to him we can be rescued from fatal delusion, and conducted in the paths of peace and joy to a state of eternal blessedness above. As the festival was ended, many of his hearers, probably, were preparing to return to their respective abodes, and their common occupations. The brightness of the day was the traveller's opportunity; but Jesus exhorted him to remember the presence of a better light, which would never leave him benighted. Are our eyes then directed unto Him, as the only source of wisdom, strength, and comfort to the soul? Do we discover any glory in him, which may properly, though inadequately, be represented by that most resplendent body in the firmament? Do we walk by his light; or are the benefits which we receive from him adequate to such an exalted description as this?

It was objected that his doctrine rested merely on his own assertion, and therefore could not be credited. But he replied, that sufficient testimony of his high character had been already given, and that they condemned him through the influence of carnal prejudices. He argued, also, that his declarations demanded their implicit assent, as he had produced the strongest proofs of his father's presence with him; but that, while they cavilled at his claims, they showed their entire ignorance of his Father, as well as of him. This was a bold charge indeed; and, considering his situation and their malevolence, it was wonderful that they bore it. But they were still under an invisible restraint, as the full time for his being delivered into their hands was not arrived. He continued, therefore, to warn them that he should shortly leave them to perish in their unbelief, and that then it would be too late to solicit an admission into his presence. When they turned his very warning into ridicule, he declared more plainly that he descended from the eavenly world, and properly belonged to it; but that hey were entirely earthly in their views, affections, nd pursuits, and that by rejecting him they would ink under the curse of their sins into final detruction.

Ah! how foolish as well as wicked is the conduct of hose who persist in opposing the Saviour, to their wn inevitable ruin! They trifle away their precious noments in raising one petulant objection after anther, while they stand on the brink of eternal misery. Should we not desire to rouse them from their lehargy? What mean your indifference and levity? I ave you forgotten that the grand concerns of your ouls are still unsecured? Instead of replying to your ubtleties, we would faithfully denounce, "the terors of the Lord," and entreat you, without delay, to elieve in the Lord Jesus Christ, lest you "die in your ins."

Still unwilling to admit, perhaps deriding, his laims, some insolently asked whom he pretended to He confirmed his former assertions, and replied, hat, though he had many charges to bring against hem, he should only for the present maintain that he cted by a sacred commission, and delivered no other loctrine than what he had received from the Father. Yet, plain as these declarations were, the people, plinded by their prejudices, did not comprehend his neaning. He, however, foretold, that, after taking im off by the violent death of the cross, they would be struck with a conviction of his divine character and righ office; and he solemnly assured them, that, hough rejected and scorned by sinners, he was not leserted of his heavenly Father, but was the constant bject of his complacency and delight. O, let us fear o indulge a captious disposition, lest we be given up o a reprobate mind! Is not this exalted Teacher "worthy of all acceptation?" Why, then, do we not sincerely and thankfully submit to his instructions?

Does not our perverse opposition evince a proud and

an earthly mind?

His bold and serious harangue, though generally despised, produced an evident impression on some of the company, who, therefore, professed to regard him as the Messiah. Addressing himself to these persons in particular, he exhorted them to yield a steadfast and persevering attention to his word, and thereby to prove themselves, beyond a doubt, his faithful disciples. He subjoined a most gracious promise, that in this way they should be enlightened with such a knowledge of his doctrine, as would establish them in a state of glorious freedom. Yet so captious were the multitude, that even this very promise gave offence. His proposal of conferring freedom implied that they had been in servitude; which they resented as a gross insult, boasting of their high privileges as the children of Abraham. Their proud and ignorant objection, however, led him to show that his meaning was spiritual; and he replied to the following effect:-

"Little as you may be aware of the melancholy truth, I solemnly assure you, that every one practising iniquity is actually a slave to sin, the worst of tyrants. So circumstanced, then, notwithstanding your descent from Abraham, you are not the children of God, and may expect to be excluded from his household. But I, his only-begotten Son, who am entitled to all the honours of his family, am empowered likewise to confer them upon you; so that, if you receive the liberty which I bestow, you will be rescued from a state of miserable bondage, and the most exalted privileges be secured to you for ever. You boast, and I allow, your extraction from an illustrious Patriarch; but his genuine offspring are not, as you are, incensed at my doctrine, nor filled with murderous rage against me. My word has place in them, though not in you. I declare the will of my Father, that which I know to be so, from the most intimate acquaintance with his mind; and you also show by your deportment what you have learned

from your father."

Here they interrupted him, still maintaining that they sprang from no other than Abraham. But Jesus proceeded :- "Were you indeed the children of Abraham, you would tread in his steps: but how widely do you differ from him in your spirit and conduct, while you are aiming at my life, for boldly asserting among you the truth of God! Your actions correspond with the original from which you are derived." This insinuation they considered as reproachful to their character, and contended that God was their Father. The Saviour answered:-"If such were your near relation to God, you would discover an affectionate regard to me, who am his immediate offspring, and have received my commission from him alone. To what shall I ascribe your ignorance of my meaning, but to your carnal dispositions, which have effectually stopped your ears against me? You, therefore, belong to another family, and are evidently the children of the wicked one, whose very tempers you betray: he has been uniformly seeking the destruction of mankind, and, by the basest treachery and falsehood, opposing divine truth: he is the parent of murder and of lies. You reject me merely because I have faithfully declared to you the counsel of God. I dare appeal to you, prejudiced as you are, that you cannot bring any charge of guilt against me: and, if you must admit my integrity, why will you not credit my assertions? Every one who is born of God, and under the influence of his grace, will yield a serious attention and an unreserved submission to his will, in whatever manner it be revealed: this, therefore, cannot be your character, as you prove by your perverse and obstinate unbelief."

These severe reproofs exasperated the Jews still

more, so that they replied, with manifest rancour, that they were now justified in their suspicions of him, as being an enemy to their religion, like the Samaritans, and acting under the instigation of the devil. He repelled the blasphemous charge with singular meekness, observing, that so far from having connexions with Satan, he had uniformly shown what had brought their contempt upon him, a zealous regard to his Father's glory; that, though he might be indifferent about his own personal honour, vet there was One, who would assert it to their entire condemnation. He added, also, the most gracious and solemn protestations, for the encouragement of the penitent, that the sincere believer in him should never taste the bitterness, or come under the power. of death. The precious promise, no less than his reproofs, incensed them, and confirmed them in the persuasion, that he was actuated by a diabolical influence. They grossly misapprehended him, as if none of his followers should suffer even the dissolution of the body, and insolently asked, what privilege or dignity he claimed beyond the ancient

He answered, "If my claims were unsupported, they might safely be despised; but I appeal to the attestations of that God, to whom you profess to stand in a peculiar relation. Alas! your pretences are false and presumptuous; on the contrary, I possess the most perfect knowledge of him, and yield a constant and exact obedience to him. You reject me with scorn; but Abraham, your great progenitor, showed the highest possible respect for my character, looking forwards with ardent desires to the day of my appearance, and, by faith, exulting in the prospect." Thus he plainly declared himself to be the Messiah, while they continued most foolishly to carp at his expressions, as implying that he had been contemporary with Abraham upon the earth. To give

the most decisive answer to their cavils, and to assert his own Deity, in express and unequivocal terms he added, while he called their attention as to a certain and interesting truth, "Before Abraham was, I AM." This language was too clear to be misunderstood. and it contains a doctrine too important to be abandoned. The very mode of speaking which he adopted is peculiar to the Godhead: and it amounts to a full proof that he is the unchangeable Jehovah, who remains "the same" from everlasting to everlasting, and, therefore, that the ages and generations of men make no difference in his existence. He affirmed, then, that he is that very God who revealed himself to Moses by that adorable name, "I AM \*." In this sense, it should seem, they received it; for immediately, conceiving him to be guilty of blasphemy, as he would have been on the supposition of his mere humanity, they prepared to stone him; and he escaped from their fury only by a miracle, concealing himself from their observation, while he withdrew from the tumultuous assembly.

How remarkable was the whole of this debate! It exhibits a striking representation of the blindness and perverseness of sinners, as also of the meekness and condescension of the Saviour. Those, whose office calls them to maintain and propagate the Gospel, may expect a similar opposition from men who are destitute of the truth. Probably the most unreasonable prejudices will so prevail, as greatly to obstruct their usefulness. The plainest expressions may be misunderstood, or wilfully distorted; the most malicious charges may be urged against them, and their characters blackened by the basest aspersions. All this may be done, even among the people for whose eternal welfare they are labouring with the most generous and unwearied assiduity. But let them study, and endeavour to copy, this

<sup>\*</sup> Exod. iii. 14.

divine Exemplar. Like the blessed Jesus, it will become them to stand unmoved against all the assaults of ignorance, pride, and envy, to obviate mistakes, and inculcate right doctrines with patience and forbearance. Yet, consistently with this gentleness of sprit, they should also warn the impenitent, and, without fear or reserve, denounce "the terrors of the Lord." They should reprove and admonish, not with rashness or malevolence, but with courage and fidelity; and, while they plainly represent the state and character of the ungodly, affectionately beseech them "to flee from the wrath to come."

Would to God that opposition to Christ had been confined to the Jews! Are there none among us, who in a similar way resist the truth? How vile their affections! How wretched their condition! They may boast of liberty, but "they are the servants of corruption." They may suppose that they are doing God service, and be ready to demand a recompense from him, even while they fulfil the purposes of Satan, and prove themselves to be totally under his influence. They may pretend to a peculiar penetration and discernment, when they are deluded by "the father of lies," and, through the ascendancy of carnal principles, "cannot hear" the pure doctrine of the Gospel. Let us pray that we may not be given up to such infatuation.

Do we, then, believe in Jesus, as he is here exhibited? Do we triumph in that Saviour whom Abraham beheld with joy? Do we trust in him, adore, praise, and serve him, as being no other than Jehovahythe great "I am," "God over all, blessed for ever?" Surely his character will justify our strongest confidence. Let us not renounce our faith, or be ashamed of our attachment. He himself exhorts us "not to be moved away from the hope of the Gospel." How animating are his promises to those who "continue in his word!" He will afford us increasing

knowledge of his truth, gradually dispersing the darkness of our minds; he will break off the fetters in which sin has long held us captive, and bring us into the glorious liberty of the children of God. He will even disarm death of its terrors, enable us to smile in the near prospect of it, and give us a perfect and everlasting deliverance. May every reader, then, possess such a firm and unshaken dependence upon him, as to say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day\*!" Amen.

\* 2 Tim. i. 12.

## JESUS CHRIST.

#### SECT. 24.

Jesus sent out seventy disciples to preach—received and addressed them upon their return—replied to the captious lawyer, and delivered the parable of the good Samaritan—visited Martha and Mary at Bethany—taught and encouraged his disciples to pray—dined with a Pharisee, and gave the most severe reproofs.

In this practical review of the life of Jcsus, it is intended to introduce the principal occurrences according to their regular order, where it can be ascertained; but on some occasions we may be allowed to depart from it, for a more convenient division of the subject into different sections. It is not of so much importance to arrange and harmonize the four Gospels, as to obtain a right knowledge of the glorious Character there delineated, and participate the rich

blessings proposed to us.

As Jesus designed to take one more journey through Galilee, he chose out a large company of assistants, whom he sent before to every town which he himself meant to visit, that, by their preaching, a serious attention might be excited among the people, and their minds disposed to receive him upon his personal appearance\*. The twelve Apostles had already gone forth with his commission, and now he selected SEVENTY other persons, the exact number fixed on for the relief of Moses in his office t. These also he divided into pairs, that they might strengthen each other's hands; and, upon their departure, he gave them instructions similar to those which he had de-

<sup>\*</sup> Luke x. 1, &c. + Numb. xi. 16.

livered to the Apostles. This appointment, probably, took place before his attendance at the feast of

tabernacles, last mentioned.

He addressed them to the following purpose:-"Unite your fervent prayers for more labourers to be sent out into the very extensive field which lies before you, that the harvest may be gathered in; for, though a large addition is now made, there is sufficient work to call for a further increase. And, as none should presume to intrude themselves into this employment, your application should be to the great Lord of the harvest, who alone can discern the proper persons, and furnish them with all necessary preparations for the sacred function. You go forth under my directions 'as lambs among wolves,' in the face of furious adversaries, who will endeavour to harass and destroy you. But commit yourselves to the care of divine Providence; nor take with you any supplies for your temporal support. Like men in haste, who are despatched upon urgent business, you are to lose no time in vain compliments \*: yet neglect not to give the strongest proofs of your benevolence, by praying for every family which you visit: and You at least, if not They, shall receive the benefit. Whatever entertainment may be offered, you will not scruple to accept it, as the wages earned by your labour; but remove not from one house to another for your own indulgence, or in search of better accommodations. In confirmation of your doctrine, and as an intimation of its benign tendency, I now invest you with full powers to heal the sick; but at the same time you must proclaim the approach of the Saviour, coming to establish his kingdom. While you depart from the people who despise your message, solemnly warn them of their sin and danger, since aggravated ruin will come upon them for their contempt of mercy. The curse of an incensed God

<sup>\* 2</sup> Kings iv. 29.

awaits the inhabitants of those cities which have scornfully rejected my ministry; and, however exalted their privileges have been, they shall finally perish with a much more tremendous destruction than even those abandoned places, Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon, which have already felt the weight of divine vengeance. Thus, also, I shall consider myself, and my Almighty Father likewise, either as regarded or contemned by the persons among whom you shall discharge your embassy; and upon their conduct towards you their everlasting salvation or perdition

will depend."

What eager solicitude, what a generous concern, did Jesus discover for the welfare of mankind! What various methods he devised, to save immortal souls! He sent out, we observe, a numerous company of harbingers and heralds, proclaiming pardon and peace; and he himself took one laborious journey after another, for the same benevolent purpose. Nor was his love less conspicuous when he warned the despisers of his Gospel that the most tremendous woes were coming upon them; for he poured out his heart in deep distress on their account. Still he presides as Head over his church; and still, with a view to rescue sinners from eternal misery, he raises up and employs many ambassadors in his service, to whom he "commits the word of reconciliation." And, as it seems most probable that he will promote the cause of truth and righteousness in the earth by means of faithful and evangelical ministers, we should unite our prayers to him for their increase, that by their testimony his name may be declared from town to town, and from one kingdom to another. Where he sends his messengers, we are encouraged to hope that he himself will soon appear, for the advancement of his own glory. Yes; he will be present to support and prosper them in their arduous and important work. He has promised,

"Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world \*."

We would, therefore, entreat those, among whom this proclamation of mercy is made, to consider how much depends upon it. "It is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life t." If it be not effectual to save you, it will aggravate your condemnation. Those, who "watch for your souls," will finally witness either for or against you, according to the reception which you give to their words. They are the representatives of their adorable Lord and Master, who will shortly arise to vindicate his own cause: and how will you meet him, if you treat his gracious

proposals with scorn or indifference?

The seventy disciples returned to Jesus, perhaps about the feast of tabernacles, with an account of their ministry. They appeared to be elated, as having succeeded beyond their expectation; and expressed their grateful surprise, because the very devils were subject to them through his name, as if nothing, from that time, should be able to stand against them. Jesus himself, also, triumphed in the downfal of Satan, not only as approving the punishment inflicted on him for his original apostacy, but as foreseeing the ruin of his interest and kingdom in the world to be approaching. He promised, therefore, to confirm to his disciples the miraculous powers which they had exercised, and to support them against every snare and danger. But, lest they should "be exalted above measure" through their distinguished privileges, he reminded them that these were comparatively of little worth, and that it was a far greater cause of thankfulness and joy to be admitted into the family of God, and enrolled among the heirs of heaven, than to possess the most absolute dominion over the infernal spirits.

On this occasion the Saviour exulted in his heart,

Matt. xxviii. 20. + Deut. xxxii. 47.

and broke forth into expressions of grateful satisfaction, from the prospect of what these feeble instruments should accomplish, though opposed by persons of consummate wisdom and prudence. But how profound the mystery! Salvation is revealed to those who are weak, and of as little account as babes, while men of admired abilities and high rank remain in ignorance and contempt of it. In this inscrutable dispensation Jesus acquiesced and rejoiced. The Lord God is a righteous Sovereign; and, under a full conviction of his equity, we should submit implicitly to his appointments, though we see not the reasons of them. It should suffice us that "so it seemed good in his sight."

Jesus took that opportunity, also, to direct the regard of his disciples to himself, as united with the Father in the grand economy of grace, as possessing an extent of power and understanding far beyond the reach of any creature, and as the only One, who, from his own immediate and intuitive knowledge, can declare the nature and will of God. Then likewise, to excite their thankfulness for being acquainted with him, he congratulated them apart from the reest, because they were favoured with higher privileges, and clearer discernment in divine things, than many of the most eminent characters in old times, prophets and kings, who were beloved of God.

And are not our obligations immense, if we "have obtained like-precious faith," and can on solid ground conclude that our "names are written in the book of life?" For, "how great things hath God done for us!" We need not envy those who were invested even with the apostolical commission and miraculous powers. That grace, which is infinitely more valuable, is bestowed upon us. Our distinguished felicity appears the more remarkable, when we observe that many are destitute of it, who in every other respect are far advanced above us. Are we the

"bales," to whom God "hath revealed these things?" The reason must be sought, not in us, but in his unsearchable counsels. Surely in the contemplation of this mercy we shall cry out, with wonder, love, and praise, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." Let us also pray for those, who are yet in darkness, that they may partake of our happiness, by being "called into marvellous light:" that their eyes may be blessed, in beholding the glory and excel-

lency of our Redeemer.

During some part of our Lord's address to the seventy upon their return, it should seem that he was surrounded by a large company. Among the rest was a certain lawyer, one of those who studied and expounded the law of Moses. He, professing some regard, but designing to involve him in a difficulty, came forward, and proposed a question. It is likely that he felt much self-confidence, or entertained a secret contempt of Jesus, while he begged to be informed what he must do for the attainment of eternal life. The subject is indeed important above all others; and had the information been asked with an humble teachable disposition, Jesus would not have refused a direct and explicit answer. But, as he knew the proud and captious temper of the man, he replied in a way which might tend to humble or silence him. He referred him to the demands of the law (upon his obedience to which the Scribe placed his dependence), assuring him that an entire compliance with those claims of perfect love, both to God and men, would entitle him to the blessedness of heaven, as the just recompense of his deeds; "This do, and thou shalt live:" as if he had said, "Perform, in their utmost extent, without diminution or interruption, all the injunctions of God's righteous commands, and sure and everlasting reward will await thee: but the least deviation or defect will expose thee to condemnation \*."

<sup>\*</sup> See Gal. iii. 10--13.

In the same manner it may be proper to treat all such persons as value themselves on their supposed goodness. This method seems calculated to convince them of their ignorance and presumption; so that the law may serve "as a schoolmaster to bring them unto Christ, that they may be justified by faith \*." We ask, if your hopes are built on your own duties, are you aware how much is required of you? Have you never failed of loving God supremely and fervently, with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind; or your neighbour as yourselves? If these dispositions have had their constant and full influence upon you, from your earliest moments to this present hour, you need not implore mercy, or be indebted to the Saviour: on the ground of justice, according to "the law of works," you may expect and even claim eternal life. But does not this very representation awaken your fears, rather than flatter your pride, or confirm your vain confidence?

What effect was produced upon the Scribe? He was neither humbled nor silenced; but still desirous to stand upon his own defence, and perhaps in order to evade conviction, he proposed another question, "Who is my neighbour?" From this circumstance our Lord took occasion to confute the erroneous notion, then generally prevalent, that neighbours included only particular friends, and such as were situated near to each other, or connected by the bonds of kindred or religion. The sense of the law was confined within a narrow compass, while it was thought that none but persons of this description only have any claim upon our benevolence. Jesus, however, showed that we are indispensably required to extend our utmost kindness to all our fellow-creatures in distress, of whatever nation or profession, though separated from us, or even incensed against us, by party quarrels or distinctions. This he did, in the parable of the good Samaritan, an affecting and instructive little history, the circumstances of which are so naturally combined, and related with such simplicity, that it cannot fail to interest every reader.

A Jew is represented as reduced to the most calamitous and dangerous condition, through the violence of robbers. Two men of sacred character, a Priest, and a Levite, travelling the same road, were witnesses of his misery: and though their office, in an especial manner, should have disposed them to every act of tenderness and compassion, they turned away from the painful sight, without even attempting his relief. But a Samaritan, who was taught from his earliest years to hate and avoid the Jews, felt commiseration upon the first view of the wretched object. Forgetting the odious contentions between the two nations, he ran to his assistance, and, with peculiar kindness, made effectual provision for his support. Such a conduct was the strongest proof of benevolence. He bound up the wounds of a stranger in misfortune, and supplied the necessities of a plundered enemy. Even this bigoted Scribe was constrained to admire the Samaritan, and to confess that he had shown himself a neighbour indeed.

The proper application is pointed out. To each of us, as well as to the lawyer, the Saviour says, "Go, and do thou likewise." There cannot be a more delicate or more forcible reproof of a cruel, covetous, and narrow mind; or a more striking representation of the necessity and happy effects of an enlarged charity. How unbounded, how active and generous, should our love be! But do we really appear to possess such a disposition? Where are the fruits? Do we not betray a proud, contracted, and unfeeling spirit? Are we not restrained from doing good, sometimes by selfishness, sometimes by malevolence? Alas! who can say that he has uniformly looked upon all men as his neighbours, and treated them

with the same kindness which he should expect for himself in similar circumstances? How little do we resemble our great Pattern, who has exhibited the most extensive and disinterested benevolence! The Lord Jesus "remembered us in our low estate," and, though we were "sinners and enemies," not only stretched out his arm to rescue us from misery, but gave himself a sacrifice, and "died for the ungodly\*." May the contemplation of this love excite us to "love"

one another, with a pure heart fervently †!" At Bethany, about two miles distant from Jerusalem, lived an amiable family, to which our Lord seems to have been much attached. It was probably upon his return from the feast of tabernacles that he called at this village to visit Lazarus and his sisters. The interview is mentioned, chiefly that we may remark the different kinds of attention which these two pious women paid to Jesus. They both received him with great affection. Mary placed herself at his feet, like an humble scholar, with an eager desire to imbibe his important instructions. But Martha, to whom perhaps the chief care of their domestic affairs belonged, discovered her regard to him by her solicitude to provide a proper entertainment. The latter, however, being too intent upon that object, complained, with some marks of peevishness, that her sister did not help her. Their Visitant, upon this, with much tenderness reproved Martha for her unseasonable and immoderate anxiety about the various concerns of the family, or the preparing of such ac-commodations as were trifling, if not needless; and at the same time solemnly reminded her, that, while many lower matters engaged her attention and distracted her thoughts, "one thing" was of absolute necessity, and that all others should give place to it. On this ground he commended the conduct of Mary, who appeared to be more "spiritually minded," as

<sup>\*</sup> Rom. v. 6-10; + 1 Pet. i. 22.

improving the opportunity for her own greatest advantage. He declared that Mary had acted wisely in preferring "the good part," because it is excellent in itself, and infinitely more valuable than all earthly possessions. It is, what they are not, secure and inviolable.

The example as well as the observations of Jesus, upon this occasion, will furnish solid instruction. We should learn from him to show the influence of our religion, as well in our common intercourse with each other as in the temple and closet. In every house where he was admitted he delivered his heavenly doctrines, "his mouth speaking wisdom, and his tougue talking of judgment\*." And shall we be unwilling or ashamed to introduce any mention of our spiritual concerns, wherever we may be? How do we appear to have the mind of Christ, if divine things engage no part of our private conversation? Do not some plead the cares of a family, the hurry of business, and an attention to company, as if these were of the first consequence, or as if God were to be regarded, and the interests of the soul consulted, only in the second place? What, then, has Jesus taught you? He declares "One thing is needful:" but how many things are so in your estimation! That which he enjoins you, as important above all others, is either totally forgotten, or thrust aside, that you may be more at leisure to pursue what is of little worth, and cannot long be secured. Even some pious persons are much obstructed in their spiritual progress through an excessive anxiety about their secular affairs. They do not, therefore, as they ought, glorify God by bringing forth fruit abundantly, nor do they enjoy the comforts of religion in themselves. But the greater part of mankind seem entirely carnal; for they propose no higher object to themselves than to gratify their animal nature; as if "the one thing

Psal. xxxvii. 30.

needful" were to make the most of the present life, to eat, drink, and be merry. A zealous regard to religion is condemned and derided, as extreme folly, though it be the truest wisdom. The servant of Jesus, who is observed to "sit at his feet and hear his word," is complained of as deserting his post. But his divine Master will plead his cause to the confusion of his opponents; and, when they shall be for ever separated from all that is now dear to them, he will possess a treasure and a happiness in the heavens, "which shall

not be taken away from him."

On another occasion, and in a different place, where Jesus had retired, he was requested by one of his disciples, at the conclusion of his devotions, to teach them to pray, as John also had taught his followers \*. It cannot be supposed that they had continued so long with him in ignorance or neglect of this duty; for they must have learned the necessity of it both from his example and his exhortations. But they now desired some particular instructions, perhaps some form of prayer, to be delivered to them: and it is supposed that the most eminent Jewish masters, as well as John the Baptist, gave their respective scholars and adherents a short model for their worship. In compliance with their wishes, then, he repeated, with certain trifling alterations, that brief but comprehensive address to God, with which he had furnished them before, as a directory for their devotions; and now he appointed it to be used as a stated form t.

It has been already observed that it might be adapted to the peculiar situation of the disciples, and intended only for that period. We could not, however, at the same time, help remarking, that, as the expressions are suitable for Christians in all ages and circumstances, it may still be retained with great propriety, both in public and private worship, though

<sup>•</sup> Luke xi. 1-13. + See Sect. 10.

not to the exclusion of other petitions. The composition is wonderful and excellent, beyond any com-mendation which we can offer. We call upon those, who desire to serve God acceptably, to study the full sense of all its parts distinctly, and endeavour to enter into its true spirit. Consider how you pray. You are here taught to approach to God with affection and confidence as to your Father, yet with profound reverence as to him who "hath prepared his throne in the heavens." His name should be dear to you; and you should implore grace for others, that it may be known and sanctified in every place, requesting also that he would establish his kingdom in righteousness by the everlasting Gospel, and that all the inhabitants of the earth may unite with those of heaven in yielding him a cheerful and perfect obedience. Looking up in faith, you must ask your daily support from him. You must confess to him your numerous and aggravated offences, humbly seeking his forgiveness, and declaring your readiness to pardon every injury received from your fellow-creatures. Yet, as you will be constantly exposed to fresh temptations, entreat him to strengthen and preserve you by the power of his Spirit, and to rescue you out of the hands of your enemy.

Such are the supplications which you are taught to offer; but you should pray as persons in earnest, who are unwilling to take a denial. Our Lord assures you, that, as one man prevails upon another, if not by argument, or through the influence of friendship, yet by his incessant solicitation, you also, by the fervour and importunity of your requests, may have power with God, and obtain his blessing. The promises of Jesus for your success are absolute and inviolable. No instance can be produced of any one continuing to wait upon God with unwearied diligence and ardent devotion, who was finally rejected. You are encouraged to expect a favourable answer,

from God's parental disposition. If you feel the affection of a father, what would you not grant to your beloved offspring, who earnestly entreat your assistance? You, indeed, who are "evil," may easily be warped from your duty, under the influence of corrupt passions; yet you cannot refuse to relieve your children. And shall God withhold any thing really good from those who send up their unceasing petitions to him? No: he will give them his Holy Spirit, which will "fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness." But, ah! how cold, how lifeless, are your prayers, if the duty be at all attempted! Shall you complain, or wonder, that you succeed no better? Will you not be roused to greater fervour? But, if you "restrain prayer before God," and call not upon his name, your guilt is extreme; and his tender mercies in waiting to be gracious will render you the more inexcusable.

It may be difficult, nor is it of any real importance, to ascertain the exact connexion of the following narrative. But at another time, when Jesus was delivering his instructions to the people, he received an invitation to dinner from a Pharisee, which he immediately accepted with his general affability and condescension\*. It should seem from the sequel, and from the manner of our Lord's address, that a scheme was formed to insnare him, and that for this purpose a large company of his usual opponents was collected together. But their malicious project was baffled; and they met with a most severe reprehension for their odious hypocrisy, and the numerous inconsistencies of their conduct.

Jesus sat down to eat without observing the common ceremony of washing his hands; when the master of the house, who narrowly watched him, secretly condemned him for the neglect. Our Lord was aware of the objection, though it was not avowed; and

<sup>\*</sup> Luke xi. 57, &c. ..

therefore he took the opportunity, not so much of vindicating himself, as of exposing the folly and dissimulation of the Pharisees in general. Many were then before him, and yet with remarkable plainness and courage he reproved them, while he detected their avarice and oppression, their pride and malignity of heart. He pointed out their absurdity in paying such scrupulous attention to external purifications, while their minds were filled with schemes of rapine, and various kinds of wickedness. He exhorted them to consider that the God who made them would not be satisfied with any outward observances. and that their great object should be to approve themselves to him. He urged them to renounce their covetousness and cruel exactions, and to be kind and liberal to the poor; in which way their food would be much more effectually sanctified to them than merely by the cleansing of their hands.

Their danger was not be concealed; and therefore, that they might no longer flatter themselves, he addressed them in language the most authoritative and majestic, and denounced against them one tremendous wo upon another for their neglect of real and inward holiness while they boasted of their formalities. He exposed, also, their ostentation and ambition, and their egregious hypocrisy, by which so

many were deceived to their utter ruin.

Jesus having included the Scribes in one of his reproofs, a person then present, belonging to that profession, expressed some degree of warmth that they too should be so severely censured. But neither fearing their anger nor courting their favour, he proceeded to condemn them for enjoining so many burdensome rites upon the people, by their absurd interpretations and traditions, while they themselves observed not their own precepts. They pretended a regard for the ancient prophets, and built the tombs of the men whom their fathers had slain. But, as

they inherited the cruel and persecuting disposition of their ancestors, they were convicted of the grossest hypocrisy; and the very sepulchres which they erected witnessed against them. Jesus therefore, knowing what was in their hearts, and what terrible consequences would follow from their violent opposition to the Apostles and preachers of the Gospel, solemnly declared that God, in righteous judgment, would shortly reckon with that generation, and bring the most awful desolations upon them for all the blood of his martyred saints which had been shed from the foundation of the world. These perverse expounders of the law had to answer likewise for the general ignorance of the people. By their false, though specious comments, they locked up the grand treasury of divine knowledge, and prevented others from receiving the Saviour. How great an aggravation of their own guilt! How could it be otherwise than that the curse of God should rest upon them?

Such were the reproofs of Jesus, suited, no doubt, to the state and temper of his hearers. It is not for us, who possess not his information or authority, to thunder out anathemas in the same manner. But his ministers, surely, should learn from him to be bold and strenuous in rebuking sin, and to declare, without respect of persons, that "the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience \*." Very frequent occasions call for language of this kind: for how numerous is the company of gross offenders, as well as ceremonious hypocrites! Shall the servant of the Lord, then, keep silence, or debase his office by smooth and flattering addresses? No: "whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear," he must "cry aloud and spare not," while he faithfully "shows them their transgression." The event must be left

to God.

What effect had our Lord's address upon his proud

<sup>\*</sup> Col. iii. 6.

nd captious auditors? Their indignation was kindled, nd yet they knew not how to vent it. They set pon him with fury, urging him to speak on various ubjects, only that they might bring an accusation gainst him. But such was his wisdom, that their chemes could not prevail. Their case stands as an admonition to future ages: and from them we should be warned to beware of formality, and of opposition of Christ or his people. How terrible the condemnation of those who are incensed by the very word which should humble them! "Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts \*."

<sup>•</sup> Heb. iii. 7, 8.

# JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 25.

Jesus warned his disciples of hypocrisy and cowardice—delivered the parable of the rich fool—gave caution against worldliness—exhorted to prepare for his coming—foretold violent persecutions—preached the necessity of repentance, on the massacre of the Galileans—described the barren fig-tree—healed an infirm woman on the sabbath—showed that many will be shut out of heaven—his message to Herod, and lamention for Jerusalem.

THE conclusion of the preceding section represented our Lord, in the midst of malicious enemies, at the house of a Pharisee, where he was invited to dine. During his continuance there, so great was the eagerness of the people without to hear his instructions, that an immense company, consisting of many thousands, assembled together, and even trampled on each other, from an earnest desire to be near him\*. gratify their wishes, therefore, he went out, and, in the presence of them all, gave a solemn charge to his disciples, that they might not be misled or discouraged by the opponents with whom he had been contending. He cautioned them to beware of that dissimulation which he had just condemned in the Pharisees, and which would operate in them like leaven, imperceptibly spreading its influence around. It were easy to assume the garb of religion, and make high pretences to a peculiar sanctity. But what would this avail? As it cannot impose upon God, so there is a day

\* Luke xii. 1, &c.

aing, when it shall be published to the whole rld; for every secret thing shall be brought to ht. Ah! how different from our present apprehenavill many characters then appear! What disnesty, treachery, and oppression, what malice and enge, what lewdness and intemperance, will be covered, which are now concealed from human obvation, and often cloaked under a show of piety! to shall stand the test of that scrutiny? Those who we possess no more than a painted outside will then

the objects of contempt and abhorrence.

The disciples had seen something of the furious position of these insidious adversaries, which might re had a bad effect upon their minds, in deterring m from a bold profession of the Gospel. Jesus. refore, thus exhorted them to maintain a holy nness in their adherence to his cause :-- "You, my ends, must prepare to meet with cruel persecution: t in my service it will be dishonourable for you to ad those who may resist, however great and powerthey may be. You cannot suffer much or long m their rage. They may, possibly, be permitted take away the life of your bodies; but their malius efforts can extend no further. Let the Lord d Omnipotent be the sole object of your fear. His luence reaches to the eternal world, and if he be ir enemy, he can render you miserable both in ir bodies and your souls for ever. Commit yourves to his care, and he will provide for your suprt. He, who forgetteth not the sparrows, worths as they may seem, is constantly mindful of your nutest concerns: 'the very hairs of your head are numbered.' But, whatever temporal advantages u may lose for your attachment to me, I, your Lord d Master, whom you are not ashamed to follow, Il acknowledge, approve, and honour you, before at glorious assemblage of angels, who shall attend in the day of my future appearance. Then the

persons who have declined an open profession of my name, through cowardice or other worldly motives shall meet with a different recompense; in a manne, equally public they shall be disowned and rejected, a base and detestable characters. They, indeed, who now oppose Me, may yet obtain forgiveness: I am the Soi of man, who come in mercy, not in judgment. Bu the case of those, who continue to despise the multi plied testimonies of the Holy Ghost, and blasphe mously ascribe his operations to the influence of Satan is remediless and desperate, their sin unpardonable That divine Agent, whom they treat with impiou scorn, will afford You his most gracious direction and support in your severest trials. Depending on hi aid, you may cheerfully face your persecutors, when you are called to answer at their tribunals: He wil inspire you with wisdom and courage, and furnish you with words and arguments to plead my cause, so tha you shall never be confounded before them."

Such were the Saviour's exhortations to his anciend disciples: and surely of us also he requires the sam steadfastness of faith, the same contempt of the rag and threatenings of men, the same unchaken adherence to him and his service. Have we any reaso for dread, while the God of heaven is engaged to suttain, protect, and comfort us, and a crown of glory it tain, protect, and comfort us, and a crown of glory it termble for the consequences, who, in opposing Christandertake to "fight against God." However heatience may bear long with them, at last he will arise to execute judgment, when they shall be drived away "as chaff before the wind," and overwhelms

with everlasting horror and despair.

After this address, Jesus was desired by one of the company to persuade his brother to agree to a fair division of their paternal inheritance. This our Londeclined, as being a matter totally foreign to his character and office. His grand design was to draw to the character and office.

men's attention to their spiritual concerns; and therefore he took occasion, from this dispute between the brothers, to warn his hearers against covetousness, one great cause of contentions in the world. He observed, that an eager solicitude to procure temporal possessions is absurd, since the largest property will not prolong our lives, or render them truly comfortable.

. He then showed the fatal tendency of an immoderate attachment to present things, by a very striking parable. A person is described as receiving a vast augmentation of fortune by the fertility of his ground, and intent upon making the most of his substance.-He proposed to erect more capacious granaries, in which his increasing store might be secured, and flattered himself with the prospect of affluence, ease, and sensual indulgence, for many years. Having attained the summit of his wishes, he determined to retire from the hurry of business, and take all the enjoyments which his wealth could furnish. Who would not have pronounced him a wise and happy man? But his schemes of pleasure and earthly felicity were suddenly broken; and, in the midst of his plans for the gratification of his animal nature, he was summoned away into the presence of an angry God. He was condemned in the court of heaven for the most egregious folly, and his soul was required to enter upon a far different state of existence; while his boasted possessions were consigned to others, not being able to protract the execution of the sentence for one moment. Alas! how common the character! Our Lord declared that all those are in a similar situation who are anxious to become opulent, and wish to spend their substance upon themselves, without consulting the will of God, or regarding the necessities of others, and who at the same time are at no pains to obtain the far more valuable riches of divine grace.

Jesus proceeded to caution his disciples against an inordinate attention to worldly circumstances, as being inconsistent with the true spirit of the Gospel, as implying a distrust of God, and a comparative neglect of eternal things. On this occasion he repeated some sentiments, which he had before advanced in his sermon upon the mount, while he spake to the following purpose:-"I charge it upon you not to distract your minds with any secular cares, not even for the necessary provision of food or raiment. Will not He. who gave you life, supply you with the proper means of supporting it? The great God sustains the ravens without any contrivance on their parts; and will he forget you, who are so much more valuable in his sight? Besides, your utmost solicitude cannot effectually secure to you the least advantage: it cannot add, in any degree, to your stature or your age. Look also upon the inanimate world, and observe God's minute attention to the very lilies, which, without their labour, he has decked with glorious ornaments, far surpassing the richest attire of the most exalted monarchs. Shall he, then, bestow such a profusion of beauty upon the short-lived flowers, and not furnish you with suitable apparel? You are the objects of his choice and love, though you are so backward to trust him. It is incongruous to your character to be intent upon such triffing concerns, and perplexed about your temporal support. This, indeed, may be the case with those who know not God; but you should leave the care of yourselves with the God of heaven, who is your Father, and who, as he perceives, can readily bestow what is needful for you. Only be you vigorously pressing towards his kingdom of glory; and, in addition to better, you shall possess those earthly blessings, which shall be expedient for you. In the prospect of that kingdom, go forth with courage, feeble and defenceless as you may seem: for, though you are a 'little flock,' your Father has decreed, and will

rejoice, to fix you in that blissful inheritance, to which He conducts you. This hope, surely, will render you comparatively indifferent about your worldly property, and dispose you to part with it, if God shall call you to the trial. This expectation will kindle a feeling regard for the poor. They demand a share in your wealth, and you will not refuse it. You will be chiefly solicitous to secure to yourselves those treasures of which you cannot be deprived, and which will preserve their value and their lustre for evermore. These alone merit the affections of your hearts; and if indeed you have chosen them for your portion, your thoughts and desires will be directed to that more

than to any other object."

Such manner of persons were the primitive Christians required to be: and is it allowable for modern Christians to be engrossed with secular pursuits, or principally attentive to the supports and comforts of the animal life? No: it is still as necessary as ever for the disciples of Jesus to be "spiritually minded," and weaned from this present world. If, then, our happiness be placed upon any temporal possessions or car-nal gratifications, we have not imbibed the spirit of the Gospel: and this very criterion, we fear, will prove that many among us have never felt the real influence of that religion which is so generally professed. Let us beware for ourselves, and listen more carefully to our divine Teacher, whose continued exhortations call off our regard from all inferior concerns, that we may be waiting for our dismission from the body, and seeking a suitable preparation for eternity.

Our Lord proceeded:—"You are stationed here only for a short season, and on a particular service. You are, therefore, to be constantly expecting the return of your Lord, diligently attending to your proper work, with 'your loins girded about,' like men in readiness for a journey, or any vigorous exertions, and with 'your lights burning,' standing in a proper

posture for the honourable reception of your Master. He may come suddenly; and therefore it is for you to be watching every moment, lest you be confounded at the intimations of his approach. The faithful and the active servant, thus persevering to the end, shall be gloriously distinguished when the Son of man ap-

peareth."

Peter inquired whether the exhortation was designed for all, or for the Apostles in particular. Jesus replied, "Wherever the steward of approved fidelity and prudence shall be placed, if his Lord shall find him performing the duties of his office, and discharging his important trust, he shall obtain peculiar notice, and be advanced to a state of high dignity. But the careless and slothful servant, who, presuming upon the delay of his Lord's return, shall abuse the confidence reposed in him, and proceed to acts of oppression and intemperance, shall be awfully surprised in the midst of his sin and folly, and instantly destroyed without remedy. The man who clearly understands, and yet despises, his Master's will, shall feel the greatest severity; for the degree of future punishment shall be proportionate to the advantages and opportunities enjoyed upon earth, according to that equitable maxim, 'Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required."

The admonition should rouse us to a serious inquiry how we are acquitting ourselves in our respective places. Are we properly fulfilling our trust? If our Lord should appear, could we meet him with joy, or expect a favourable reception from him? Are we waiting for his coming? On the contrary, are we not negligent and treacherous, endcavouring to put away from us the thought of death and judgment? One thing, however, we must allow; we have had clear information in our duty: repeated calls and exhortations have been addressed to our consciences by religious books, by friends and ministers. Much, indeed, in various ways, has been committed to us;

which, if we remain impenitent, will render our guilt more heinous, and our condemnation more ag-

gravated

Many might be looking for temporal advantages from the service of Jesus; and therefore, to obviate their mistake, he observed, "The most violent contentions will prevail, in consequence of my Gospel; vet, afflictive as these may be, I cannot but earnestly wish that they were already begun. I have myself extreme agonies to endure; and, though I see the whole before me, I long to enter upon the conflict, and feel the most ardent desires for the great event to be accomplished. Let my followers, therefore, be content to be opposed and hated; for my kingdom, though calculated to produce universal peace, will occasion the most unnatural and furious contests, because of the general prejudice and enmity against it. Many of those, who are united by the strongest ties of kindred, will now forget their obligations, and show a violent aversion to such as claim their tenderest regard. This must be ascribed to the perverseness of men, who reject my doctrine in contempt of the clearest evidences. They are attentive enough to the common concerns of life, and discover much ingenuity in judging of the wind and the weather: but, ah! how stupidly unmindful of the surprising testimonies which God has given of his Son! Might not reason itself have led them to a more consistent determination? Is there any one liable to be convicted of an offence, for which he may suffer the severest penalties of the law, who will not be disposed to seek reconciliation with his adversary, while any favourable terms can be obtained? Give diligence, then, to procure forgiveness, with your offended God, before he proceed against you and summon you to judgment, when nothing but rigorous justice can be looked for, and the everlasting punishment due to your iniquities will be inflicted."

Let us seriously attend to these declarations of our Redeemer. The effects which he foretold have taken place: furious and bloody persecutions have been raised against his faithful disciples; and even to this day these persons are generally opposed and hated by some of their nearest relatives. Let us not, however, be intimidated by the prospect of any difficulties in his service; but, while we contemplate his courage and zeal in meeting death itself for our sakes, let us cheerfully follow. We blame the stupidity of the Jews in their obstinate rejection of the Messiah; but do We discern the character, and unfeignedly submit to the authority, of Jesus? O, let us gladly accept his mediation, that we may not come under the wrath of Almighty God, as we have deserved, nor be cast into that prison, from whence there can be no deliverance!

Some of our Lord's audience acquainted him with the terrible slaughter of certain seditious Galileans, whom Pilate had put to death, even while they were offering their sacrifices\*. But, without passing any judgment on their case, he endeavoured to turn the attention of the people to their own perilous situation, representing them all as equally in a state of ruin, and exposed not merely to temporal calamities, but to eternal perdition, without an entire change and renovation. Those who are destroyed suddenly, and by any singular affliction (as the Galileans, and others who had been killed by the fall of the tower of Siloam), are often considered as offenders of the most atrocious kind, marked out, by the visitation of an angry God, as monuments of his peculiar vengeance. Jesus, however, has here taught us not to decide against them in so rash a manner, or to set ourselves above them, but seriously to remember our own danger, and the absolute necessity of our conversion. He so-

<sup>\*</sup> Luke xiii. 1, &c.

lemnly declared twice together, "Except ve repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Is this awful assertion sufficiently regarded? Do not many draw the most uncharitable conclusions against others, and presumptuously flatter themselves on their supposed comparative excellence? It is allowed that persons of a very profligate character have incurred the divine displeasure, and must be reformed; but those, who have been regular in their conduct, cannot bear to be ranked upon a level with them, or believe that there is any need of deep contrition for themselves. This is indeed a fatal delusion: since all inherit a natural depravity, all must be renewed and sanctified; to

those who are not, salvation is impossible.

To impress them with a sense of their danger, Jesus delivered a parable. A fig-tree, planted in a well-cultivated soil, disappointed the owner's wishes for three successive years. As it produced nothing, it cumbered the ground. Its foliage, unaccompanied with fruit, was no compensation for the pains and expense of the proprietor, who therefore directed it to be cut down. The servant to whom the care of the trees was committed requested that it might be spared one year longer, till further expedients were tried; and then it was agreed, that, if it still continued barren, it should be destroyed as utterly hopeless. The instructions hereby conveyed are obvious. It is, surely, a reasonable injunction, that those who are placed in the church, under the culture of religious means and ordinances, should bring forth fruit unto God. But ah! how many, even in such a favoured situation, remain unprofitable, and therefore must necessarily be displeasing to God! Through the intercession of his Son, or the prayers of his ministers, he may graciously delay his threatened vengeance; but the time of his patience is limited, and, if repeated warnings produce no good effect upon them, the stroke of justice must fall: they shall feel the weight of his indignation.

As Jesus travelled through Galilee, he attended the public worship of the synagogues on the sabbath. In one of these assemblies, a poor unhappy woman. who had been bowed together by infirmity for eighteen years, excited his compassion; and instantly, without any solicitation, he restored her to health and vigour. Such a miraculous display of power and benevolence should have drawn forth praises from every tongue. But the ruler of the synagogue objected to it with indignation, as if it had been a profanation of the sacred day. Jesus, however, convicted him of the grossest hypocrisy in his pretended zeal for God, and defended his own conduct, in relieving this afflicted creature, from the attention which they all paid to their very cattle on the sabbath. Acts of mercy, we observe, as well as those of necessity, are not prohibited as an infringement of the holy rest. His enemies, therefore, were ashamed of their opposition; and the common people were the more attached to him for his wonderful operations. On that occasion he repeated the parable of the grain of mustard-seed, and that also of the leaven, in both which he represented the gradual and extensive enlargement of his spiritual kingdom, notwithstanding the resistance it should meet with. The hatred and violence of men shall not frustrate the counsel of God. His Gospel shall spread; and its blessed influence shall be felt and acknowledged through all the nations of the earth.

Our Lord proceeded from one city and village to another, directing his course to Jerusalem. In every place he scattered the good seed of divine truth, diligently improving the short time which now remained for him in the world. Upon the road, as it should seem, a question was put to him by one of the company, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" The inquiry was probably made through vain curiosity, which Jesus never gratified: and, therefore, instead of giving a direct answer, he thus addressed himself to

the consciences of the people, exhorting them to be earnestly solicitous for their own salvation, rather than to indulge any subtle speculations about that of others:—

"The path to heaven lies through a strait gate, which is difficult of access, and your entrance may be resisted by numerous enemies. Be not, however, discouraged; but contend for admission in the most resolute manner, and break through every obstruction. Many, who are totally indifferent about eternal life, or refuse to go in the only appointed way, will shortly find that the door is finally and for ever barred against them. It will then be too late to implore the divine mercy. Though they cry ever so importunately, 'Lord, Lord, open unto us,' the great Master of the household will reply, 'I know you not.' He will not admit the plea of their former high privileges or honourable situation in the church; but dissemblers, formalists, and all who die in impenitence, shall be covered with terrible confusion, while the Judge shall disown their boasted relation to Him, and shall pronounce with awful majesty, 'Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.' Inconceivable anguish, remorse, and despair, shall overwhelm many of those, who gloried in their near connexion with the most eminent saints of God, when they shall see themselves for ever separated from their society. The unbelieving Jews shall behold the despised Gentiles, from the remotest corners of the earth, enter into glory, while they shall be eternally thrust out. Great numbers of those, who may now be thought the furthest from God, shall attain a state of peculiar exaltation in my kingdom; and not a few, who are here distinguished above others by their religious advantages, shall then be marked out, for their contemptuous abuse of them, by the severest vengeance."

Does not the solemn admonition excite an alarm in us, who are placed in the Christian church, and favoured with an evangelical ministry? Let us not presume upon our external privileges, but consider how much is to be done. Let us be roused from our stupor; for "it is high time to awake out of sleep." If we be distressed by the fear of finding the door barred against us, let us now look unto Jesus, and cry, with all the strength and vigour of our souls, "Lord, Lord, open unto us," and our application

will infallibly succeed. On the same day on which our Lord had delivered the exhortations last mentioned, intelligence was brought that Herod, the governor of the country, was determined to destroy him. This was said with an intention of intimidating him from prosecuting his labours in those parts. But Jesus could not be terrified; and therefore he replied, by a message to the crafty and persecuting prince, that, in spite of all his schemes, he would proceed with his work, performing the most miraculous and benevolent operations a little longer; that very shortly he should finish his course; and yet that he should lay down his life, not in Galilee, where he then was, but in Jerusalem, the grand seat of persecution. The example teaches us not to be dismayed, whoever may threaten or oppose us, in the proper execution of our office. Let us faithfully attend to our respective duties, and persevere in them, though surrounded by dangers. We shall walk but a few days more; and the God whom we serve will protect us till the end of our present appointment be answered. O that we may close our labours honourably, and then, like our Lord, "be perfected!"

After observing that he must perish in Jerusalem, he was led to reflect upon the heinous guilt, and approaching desolation, of that murderous city, and broke forth into the most tender and affecting lamentation over it. Jerusalem was the city where the blood of many prophets and holy men had been

shed; the city which had scornfully rejected the graious offers of the Saviour, repaid his services of love with cruelty, and even then meditated his destrucion; yet, abandoned as it was, Jesus expressed the leepest sorrow for its miserable state. He declared that God, in righteous judgment, was about to lay waste the place with the most awful calamities, till the wretched inhabitants should learn to value and ong for their promised Messiah, though they despised

Him, who sustained that character.

What forbearance, kindness, and compassion, do we discover in the character of our Redeemer! Still he possesses the same bowels of mercy. Long time Joes he strive with sinners, using one expedient after another to promote their salvation. According to his own description, he still proposes to gather them as a hen gathers her helpless brood under her wings, to protect and nourish, and to afford them security and comfort in himself. But, alas! how many proudly spurn at the offer! And what can be expected to follow from their base conduct but final and remediless perdition? Yet, even then, he abandons them, as it should seem, with difficulty, charging their destruction upon themselves: "I would, -and ve would not\*." May we learn wisdom from the wretched infatuation of those who have perished in their unbelief! May we all, therefore, with one heart and voice, welcome the Saviour, who brings with him pardon, peace, and eternal life! Let us take up our words now with unfeigned faith, and we shall speak them with confidence and joy at the last day, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!" Amen.

<sup>\*</sup> See also Hos. xi. 3.

## JESUS CHRIST.

## SECT. 26.

Jesus dined with a Pharisee on the sabbath—healed of dropsy—inculcated humility and a regard to the poor—delivered the parable of the great supper—warned his followers to prepare for suffering—vindicated his attention to sinners by the parables of the lost sheep—the piece of silver—and the prodigation.

If our review of the life of Jesus affect us as it ought, it will not only produce in us an admiration of his excellency, who is "fairer than the children of men," but regulate our conduct and sanctify our dispositions. While we "behold the glory of the Lord," we shall be "changed into the same image \*.' Let us pray continually that we may feel this influence from his example; so shall we be followers of the Lord, "not in word, neither in tongue, but in deed, and in truth."

Jesus was travelling through Galilee towards Jerusalem; and, probably in that journey, a principal Pharisee, a man of rank, invited him to dinner †. It might seem an act of condescension in a person of eminence to ask or admit such a guest into his house as appeared to be greatly his inferior. But a favour was conferred on the Pharisee rather than on Jesus The most exalted monarch might have said with reason, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my 100f." It was an instance of "the meekness and gentleness of Christ," that he vouch-

<sup>\* 2</sup> Cor. iii 18. + Luke xiv 1, &c.

safed to converse freely with sinful creatures, and discovered no distance in his behaviour. He readily gave his company to those who desired it; not indeed for his own pleasure, or the convenience of eating with them, but for their benefit. He "sought not his own profit, but the profit of many, that they

might be saved."

As this occurred on the sabbath, we infer that religion does not require us to refuse all intercourse with others throughout that day. There may be proper occasions for friendly visits in some parts of it; but we should be careful to maintain a spirit and conversation suitable to its grand design. The example of Jesus cannot be adduced in vindication of that vanity and dissipation by which it is so generally

perverted and profaned.

It should seem that many persons were assembled at the Pharisee's house, and such as were not well affected to Jesus; for "they watched him." Perhaps the invitation was given, not from kindness, but malevolence, on purpose to pass the most invidious censures upon him. How odious the disposition of those who are eagle-eved in scrutinizing the conduct of others, and who rejoice to find any real objections against them? And yet you, who are the faithful disciples of Jesus, are frequently placed in the midst of such malignant observers. Their attention is fixed upon you, with a view, not to commend what is laudable, but to discover and expose your faults, that so they may reproach that holy name by which you are called. You, therefore, should be vigilant as well as they, that their wishes may be defeated, and themselves ashamed, when they shall see the wisdom and consistency of your deportment.

A person who was present, afflicted with the dropsy, excited the compassionate regard of Jesus. He, however, knowing that the lawyers and Pharisees before him were seeking for an accusation against

him, appealed to them whether it would be any violation of the sabbath to perform a cure on that day. They were unable to reply, while he, unmindful of their censures, instantly restored the diseased man to perfect health, observing, that, however they might object to this act of mercy, they would none of them scruple to relieve their very cattle in distress. They felt the force of his words, and were confounded. Thus, likewise, it frequently happens that the enemies of religion are suddenly restrained and abashed by a serious remark or a solemn address to their consciences. Let us not, therefore, be deterred by their insidious designs, but persevere in the path of

duty.

Jesus not only justified himself, but reproved them for their pride and love of precedency. He took notice that they were all ambitious of the highest seats at the table, and argued that such a contention for places of honour was extremely disgusting, and that it would be much more becoming to give way to others. He showed that an arrogant spirit is odious, and, while it claims respect, incurs contempt; and, on the contrary, that a modest and humble deportment, which seems to shun observation, invariably conciliates esteem. This is the case in the common intercourse of men; and it holds true, if we apply it to our temper and conduct towards God. "He resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble \*." Who will not allow that it is incumbent upon us, in his presence, "to take the lowest room?" Yet how little are the apostolic injunctions regarded or understood, "In lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves:" "in honour preferring one another t."

Jesus continued to deliver the most serious instructions and admonitions to the company before him. With a reference, no doubt, to their general

<sup>\* 1</sup> Pet. v. 5. + Phil. ii. 3. Rom xii. 10.

spirit and practice, while he addressed himself to the person who had invited him, he condemned the custom of providing sumptuous and costly entertainments merely for their relations and opulent neighbours, and recommended an attention to the relief and comfort of the afflicted, in all their various distresses. How much extravagance prevails in supporting magnificent tables for the reception of those who want nothing! The large sums which are thus expended serve only to feed our own pride and sen-suality. But what a sordid parsimony is shown in contributing to the support of the truly necessitous, who can make no returns! Those, however, are blessed, who, from faith and love unfeigned, "deal their bread to the hungry, and bring the poor, that are cast out, to their houses \*." The Lord of heaven will consider himself as their debtor, and will render them an abundant recompense in the great day of retribution.

The solemn discourse of Jesus, probably, left a good impression on the audience. One of the company, at least, expressed his approbation and desire of continuing the subject, by remarking the exceeding felicity of those who shall be admitted to the sacred feast which God has provided in his kingdom. Possibly he might not understand or really wish for the happiness of which he spake; however, in order to excite both him and all present to a serious examination of their state, Jesus showed that the most gracious offers of it are made to mankind, and rejected with contempt by the greater part.

He represented, in a most interesting and affecting parable, a large and rich supper prepared for the accommodation of many guests. The Lord God, by the Gospel of his Son, has furnished the grand entertainment here referred to, in which every thing is set before us that can give delight or vigour to the soul.

How valuable and exquisite are the blessings of which it consists! They are such as these: pardon, peace, holiness, and fellowship with God, even upon earth; divine light, strength, and consolation, communicated to the soul; an infallible promise of an admission into heaver, and a present foretaste of its joys. Who does not ardently desire to partake of the sumptuous banquet? It is a royal feast; and no want of provisions need be apprehended, for there is

a bountiful and inexhaustible supply.

Many guests are invited, and an urgent message is sent, pressing their immediate attendance, since the necessary preparations for their reception are now completed. Thus the call of mercy is given, by the publication of the Gospel, to an innumerable company, who are earnestly exhorted not to neglect the gracious offer. It was first, and in a particular manner, addressed to the Jews; but the language is the same to all who hear it, from one age to another, "Come, for all things are now ready." Every thing is done, on God's part, which is proper and requisite for the securing of eternal salvation to our guilty race. But their consent is indispensable; and is it possible that this can be refused?

Those, who are bidden, are unwilling, on various pretences, to accept the kind invitation. Different excuses for their absence are framed; all weak and ridiculous. It is alleged that they have other engagements; and yet these are such, as, though not wrong in themselves, are trifling, or may be deferred, and need not prevent their attendance. Their very pleas, therefore, show a marked contempt of the entertainment. Thus, alas! the proposals of the Gospel are rejected with scorn. Men pretend, indeed, to apologize for their conduct. Secular cares and occupations, or domestic comforts, so totally engross them, that it is supposed impossible and unnecessary for them to pay any regard to their spiritual concerns.

Such reasons, surely, cannot be admitted in their vindication; nay, rather, they will condemn them, as proving their hearts to be alienated from God. Their employments may not be sinful, but highly proper, if pursued on right principles, and in due subordination to the care of their souls. Yet, probably, more persons perish eternally through an immoderate and unseasonable attention to things which are right in themselves, than by gross and avowed

iniquity.

After the refusal of those who were first bidden, the invitation is enlarged. The servant is charged to bring in the poor and disabled; and, as sufficient room still remains for the accommodation of many more guests, he is despatched in search of those who are dispersed abroad in the most forlorn and wretched condition. Even these, the refuse of men, are importuned, by the most cogent arguments, to enter, and satisfy their wants; that so the sumptuous preparations may not be lost. The Jewish nation despised their own mercies; but "through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles \*." To us, who are "the ends of the earth," is the gracious call addressed. Though we are, in a spiritual sense, " poor, and maimed, and halt, and blind," we are allowed to partake of the rich banquet. Nay, though we be sinners of the most abandoned character, fitly represented by those who lie in "the highways and hedges," we are permitted, and even pressed in the most forcible manner, to come. Many have already complied with the invitation; but "vet there is room" for thousands more; and it is the Lord's determination that his house shall be filled.

The Master is incensed when his kindness is rejected, and he resolves, in displeasure, that those, who have shown such contempt of him, shall be excluded from his entertainment. This is an awful ad-

monition indeed. The Lord of heaven and earth considers himself as insulted when his Gospel is made light of. Do we not dread his indignation? Why, then, do we trifle with his messages of mercy? Possibly they may never be renewed. He may instantly bar the door against us, and declare "Those men shall not taste of my supper." Since he has done this against the Jews, let us fear for ourselves, "lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief \*."

Great multitudes still attended Jesus in his progress; and yet probably but few of them were attached to his cause from right principles. It is to be expected, that, amongst the numerous professors of the Gospel, there will be many of a suspicious character. All, therefore, should be exhorted to examine of what sort their religion is, from what motives it was first taken up, and whether they so value it as to be willing to suffer for its sake. To this purpose our Lord addressed the vast concourse of people who followed him:—

"If any man would enter into my service, he must renounce all worldly views and expectations. Whosoever consents not, on every necessary occasion, to go in opposition to his nearest friends and relatives, so as to appear even to hate them; whosoever is averse to give up the most beloved enjoyments, and lay down life itself, in my cause, cannot be acknowledged as my disciple. Severe as the trial may seem, if he refuse to combat difficulties, to endure extreme hardships, and to persist in the path which my example or command may point out, he possesses not the temper of mind indispensably requisite for my servants.

"You, therefore, who profess an attachment to me, should deliberate well what you do; for you are undertaking an arduous and important business. Like one who is about to raise an edifice, you should make the proper calculations, that you may know whether you can finish the work which you are planning. The inconsiderate builder, whose labours are disappointed and suspended, is deservedly exposed to the derision of others. Or, as a prince, who meditates an hostile expedition against a neighbouring power, you should inquire if you are sufficiently prepared to meet your enemy. Is your force such as to give you a reasonable hope of success? It were better not to provoke an attack than hastily to rush into the battle, and there to betray your weakness and cowardice. Rather than fall in the conflict, or basely desert your standard, remain in your present state, bad as it may be, and prefer a dishonourable peace to a destructive war.

"Thus you should examine whether you possess what my service demands; for, if you be unwilling to renounce the dearest objects in life for my sake, you cannot be ranked amongst my people, or receive any advantage at my hands. With an unsound profession of religion, you would resemble the 'salt which has lost its savour,' and then, instead of answering any valuable purpose, as those who are 'the salt of the earth,' you would be useless, or a nuisance in your place, fit only to be cast out with contempt. Let every one who desires instruction attend to the solemn admonition."

Such was our Lord's address to his followers: and, in its main argument, it is perfectly applicable to ourselves. The same bold and disinterested regard to him, which he then required, we also must possess. With the same holy jealousy and circumspection we should search and try our hearts. Are we his disciples-indeed? What motives or expectations induced us to assume that character? Or, what is our present plan? Are we determined to give up every thing which stands in competition with Christ, that he may be our "all in all?" If otherwise, let us not act as

dissemblers with God, lest we be rejected with abhorrence, as far more detestable than those who never

made pretensions to sanctity.

The foregoing exhortation may seem harsh and severe to persons of a tender spirit; and those who are oppressed with guilt may be ready to infer that Jesus forbids, rather than encourages, their application. But the following representation will obviate such a conclusion.

Many publicans and sinners came about him, showing great eagerness in listening to his instructions \*. Nor did he disdain their company, or drive them from him by denunciations of vengeance, as if their case were desperate. His condescending attentions and compassionate addresses were calculated to inspire them with humble hope towards God. These, however, displeased the Scribes and Pharisees; and they insinuated that he countenanced the profane and licentious. A similar objection is often urged against his ministers, when those who have been dissolute and abandoned are drawn to hear them. It is thought a reproach to the Gospel that it gives the most gracious invitations, and proposes a full and free forgiveness, to men of this description. But this is, in fact, its brightest glory, though too dazzling for carnal eyes to behold; and, accordingly, they turn away from it with disgust. Those especially, who expect and claim a preference for their own supposed goodness, quarrel with the greatness of the mercy, and generally pretend a vast concern for the interests of morality, which, they rashly conclude, are likely to sustain an injury. In opposition to them, we believe it to be for the honour of Christ that "he receiveth sinners," even those who are marked out as peculiarly infamous for their numerous and aggravated offences. He welcomes, pardons, sanctifies, comforts, protects, and saves them. This is extensive, rich, and distin-

<sup>\*</sup> Luke xv. 1, &c. .

guishing grace indeed, and it should induce us more than ever to love, and praise, and trust him. He acts in a way worthy of himself: and those, who know his character, admire that very part of it which enrages the Pharisees.

He vindicated his own conduct, showing its propriety, and the extreme unreasonableness of the objections urged. This he did in three parables, all tending to illustrate the abundance and the freeness of his mercy, and each an emblem of the favourable reception which penitent sinners, though they have been accounted most hopeless, shall meet with from him. Let the transgressor, then, who is ready to sink into despair, be encouraged to lift up his eyes to this dear Lord and Saviour, who will not disdain to

help him.

A striking appeal is made to our own feelings, and the general practice of mankind. Where is the person, who, losing only one out of a numerous flock of sheep, will not be at pains to search after it, and express a peculiar pleasure in its recovery, especially if it had appeared unlikely to be found? Our own miserable state is here exhibited. We have wandered far from the fold of God, and, though exposed to want, and the assaults of furious and malicious enemies, are unwilling of ourselves to return. But our attention is directed to the compassionate care of Jesus, under the character of "the good Shepherd," who, with much labour to himself, seeks and rescues the lost sheep, and takes it under his immediate protection. Nor should this be considered as a trifling incident, a matter of indifference. Every instance of the conversion of a sinner is an important event, and will communicate the highest delight to those who understand the worth of an immortal soul. Jesus himself exults, and all the blessed inhabitants of heaven express a rapturous joy, as if their own happiness were increased, when any, however profligate,

is "turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." They triumph in such a restoration, as being a peculiar acquisition, more than in the continued felicity of established believers, whom they looked upon as already secure. This is a grand display of pure and disinterested benevolence in the celestial world. Who shall object, or be tortured at the sight, but the malignant prince of dark-

ness, and they who bear his image?

Another representation, to the same purpose, is given us in the case of a poor woman, who, after much anxiety and diligent search, finds the piece of money, which she had lost out of her little treasure. This appears a prize peculiarly valuable, and yields her more satisfaction than all her other stock, which she considered as a safe possession. Such is the generous concern which Jesus feels for the perishing souls of sinners. In whatever instances his grace proves effectual, so that they, "who sometimes were far off, are made nigh" to God, he rejoices that he has done and suffered so much for their salvation; and the holy angels, who are called to witness the momentous change, are filled with wonder, love, and praise. And shall we presume to censure him for this exalted kindness? Rather, shall we not take occasion from it to admire the Shepherd, who came in search of us, and adore the ever-blessed Lord of all, who spared no pains for our recovery?

The subject is still further illustrated in another parable. A story is related, containing circumstances to which no hearer can refuse to listen; and the simplicity of the narrative is such, as not only engages the attention, but interests and affects the heart.—The younger of two sons, after receiving his proportion of fortune, is represented as departing from his father's house, the restraints of which were irksome to him, and going to a distant country. There the thoughtless youth squandered away his

substance by intemperance. He was soon reduced to the most infamous servitude, and to such a degree of wretchedness, that he was on the point of perishing by hunger. A lively emblem of our sinful conduct, and its miserable consequences! A particular reference to the Gentile world, and to the case of profligate characters, might be designed. But we have all resembled this foolish man, in disliking the strictness of true religion, casting off the fear of God, and departing from him, with a full determination to gratify the desires of our hearts. And have we found the happiness which we expected in our own ways? Alas! far otherwise. The effects of our apostacy have been distressing and ruinous in the extreme. Like the poor prodigal, we are become destitute, enslaved, and contemptible. In such a state we can procure nothing to satisfy the soul, and we stand on the brink of destruction. How pitiable the case! And it is the more pitiable, as few are sensible of their degradation and wretchedness.

A change, however, took place in the unhappy youth. "He came to himself," as if he had been till that time intoxicated or insane; and then reflecting on the comfortable situation he had left in his father's family, and the misery, disgrace, and danger, which he had brought upon himself, he formed the resolution of returning to his insulted parent. He remembered his former pride, rebellion, and wickedness; and his purpose was to confess his aggravated guilt, and earnestly to request the shelter of his father's roof, though it should be in the lowest capacity of a menial servant. He proceeded, without delay, to execute his plan. In this stage of the history we perceive the pleasing character of a true penitent. Then only does a man "come to himself," or enjoy the proper exercise of his reason, when he feels convictions of his folly and baseness, and discovers strong desires of restoration to the divine favour. And what other expedient can the awakened sinner adopt, but to fice

to his offended God, to pour out his soul with unfeigned contrition, and to lift up his voice to Heaven with incessant cries for mercy? Though he dare not be confident of acceptance, it will be proper, surely, to try the effect of an humble application; and, if he cannot ask for the privileges of a child, let him earnestly solicit an admission into the family on any terms. But his former practices, principles, and connexions, must be renounced, and a return not only resolved on, but instantly attempted.

The kind and forgiving father beheld the son at a distance; and, as if he had forgotten his past ingratitude and perverseness, without waiting for his nearer approach, he ran with open arms to embrace him. The penitent youth began his intended confession: but the indulgent parent, as if impatient to relieve his distress, interrupted him, prevented his request. assured him of his love by the strongest tokens, and immediately commanded all his household to give the most expressive demonstrations of their joy. inasmuch as his dear child, who had been considered as irretrievably lost, was restored to life and happiness. What does all this teach us, but that God can pardon more freely and extensively than we could have conceived? He views with delight the very beginnings of repentance, the first efforts of a sinner towards a return. He listens with satisfaction to his broken cries for mercy, and, instead of upbraiding him with any part of his accumulated guilt, he hastens to confer every mark of affectionate regard. The angels of heaven also, as well as believers upon earth, are required to exult in that event, from which the most glorious effects are produced. Such is the lovingkindness of our God! Who then shall despair of acceptance, or hesitate to apply unto him?" "He will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy: he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing "."

<sup>\*</sup> Zeph. jii. 17.

But one of the family refuses to participate in the general happiness. The elder son is disgusted at the attention shown to his brother, who had been so licentious and abandoned, and, while he boasts of his own dutiful subjection to his father, complains that he meets not with such a preference as he might have expected. The father condescends to argue with him on the unreasonableness of his objections, even allowing the justice of his claims, and still maintains that it was every way proper and expedient to express the highest delight in the recovery of a child, who had been given up as lost. This part of the parable contains a striking reproof of those proud and captious adversaries, the Scribes and Pharisees, who reproached the Saviour for receiving sinners. Here their own perversences is exhibited; for while they were incensed that any notice should be taken of the most dissolute characters, or at least that they should be admitted to favour upon the same terms with themselves, and while the Jewish nation in general could not bear "that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body," they most exactly resembled the elder brother. And do not many, in modern times, betray a similar aversion to the rich grace of the Gospel, which is extended to the most heinous offenders? There are those who value themselves on the uninterrupted regularity of their conduct, and are extremely disgusted that no peculiar compliment is paid to their excellence, and that others are put upon a level with them. But are they not wrong, even on their own principles? For, granting all that they can possibly urge in their behalf, no injury will be done to them by the kind and affectionate manner in which every penitent is received. Let them make good their claim, and they will be treated with suitable respect. But let them not refuse to rejoice, when those, whose cases appeared most hopeless, are taken into the number of the

children of God, and heirs of everlasting life. The Lord God will vindicate his own glory in dispensing his mercy freely. Let us not petulantly object to any part of his plan of redemption, but drop all our angry prejudices against it. Let us implore forgiveness for ourselves, as those who deserve to perish; and under such a conviction we shall wonder, not that others are saved, but that we, who "were enemies, are reconciled to God by the death of his Son."

## JESUS CHRIST.

## SECT. 27.

Jesus delivered the parable of the unjust steward—showed the use of money—reproved the Pharisees—described the case of the rich man and Lazarus—exhorted to avoid giving offence, to forgive injuries, and maintain faith—cured ten lepers—foretold the destruction of Jerusalem—described the nature of acceptable prayer by the parable of the importunate widow, and that of the Pharisee and publican.

JESUS directed his steps towards Jerusalem, with a full view of all his sufferings before him, and even with an earnest desire to enter upon them. He was yet in Galilee; and during his progress through that country he continued to exercise his ministry, labouring to diffuse the knowledge of the truth, and to give unequivocal proofs of his divine character. While we contemplate him persisting in his work with diligence and cheerfulness to the very last, may we learn to persevere in the most vigorous exertions for the glory of his name, till we finish our course! What though the cross lies before us? Let us imitate the holy example of the Saviour, and we shall follow him to his kingdom.

Publicans and sinners, we have seen, attended on his preaching, and many Scribes and Pharisees also were present at the same time. In the audience of them all, and with a view to their instruction, he addressed his disciples, pointing out in what manner worldly possessions are to be improved. He spake, as usual, in parabolical language, and represented a rich man calling his steward to account, that he might dismiss him for unfaithfulness in his trust. The guilty servant attempted not his own vindication, but showed extreme solicitude about his future support. He contrived to make friends to himself by falsifying his books in favour of the various debtors of his lord, that so they might be disposed to entertain and assist him when discarded from his office. The expedient was dishonourable and base, but it was ingenious; and, therefore, his master, who could not but condemn the injustice, admired the prudence of the man, who had so artfully provided for his own subsistence. We are here taught to consider ourselves as the stewards of God, who is the great Lord and Proprietor of all. At no distant period we must give up our accounts, and be removed from our present post. What, then, shall we do? Have we not been negligent and treacherous in the discharge of our trust? Have we not wasted our Master's goods, devoting that to the purposes of pride and sensuality, which God claims for his own? How shall we answer to the accusation? Have we no fears about our future condition? Or, what schemes have we formed for our own security in the day of calamity?

Jesus observed, at the close of the parable, that they whose hearts are fixed upon this world are much more attentive to their secular interests, than those are to their spiritual and eternal concerns, whom God hath taught to know their duty and happiness. Surely there is abundant cause to reprove the remissness of Christians among ourselves; for we perceive in them but little of that contrivance and assiduity for the welfare of their souls, which men in general discover for the attainment of the low and

trifling objects of the present life.

Jesus, also, improved and applied the parable to

the following effect:—"Riches, which commonly deceive the expectations of their possessors, and often are subservient to the purposes of sin, may yet be employed to great advantage. By a proper use of them, you may conciliate the esteem of those whose friendship is most valuable. Many, whom you have instructed, relieved, visited, and cheered, and to whom your bounty has endeared you, may go before you to heaven, and, upon your removal from the place you now fill up, may stand ready to welcome you to the same blissful habitations, where they will confess their obligations to you. A very small share, indeed, of wealth, may be committed to your care; but your religious principles will be evinced by your behaviour in the lowest station, so that we may safely infer the following effect:-" Riches, which commonly in the lowest station, so that we may safely infer from it what would be your conduct in a higher. If you act as unfaithful stewards in the disposal of your temporal substance, worthless as it is, how can you expect to be intrusted with those blessings which are of real value? And if you treacherously misapply what is not strictly your own property, but only put into your hands for the benefit of others, you have no reason to believe that God will confer upon you a certain and everlasting possession. How necessary is it, then, that you make a deliberate choice whom you will serve. You will be supremely attached either to God or the world; and, in proportion as you esteem the one, the other will be disregarded. It is impossible that you can live in subjection to two masters, whose demands are so directly opposite."

The Pharisees heard the solemn admonition; but they treated it with scorn, because the love of money had the ascendency in their hearts, and the doctrine of Jesus struck at the root of that vile principle. The ministers of God, like their great Exemplar, must expect to be derided by those whose practices and tempers they condemn: yet they should not, on this account, keep silence. Jesus reproved the hypocrisy of the Pharisees in the most awful terms, declaring, that, while it was their object to preserve appearances before men, God perceived their inward dispositions, and that He looks with abhorrence on those things which short-sighted mortals may admire. Would to God that every proud and covetous pretender to piety, whose reputation stands high in the church, would seriously consider the tremendou truth!

The Pharisees professed a high regard for the Mosaic institution. Our Lord, therefore, remarked to them, that this was designed to continue only till John the Baptist appeared; that in him God began to open the new dispensation, and to set up the kingdom of Messiah; and that of the benefits and blessings of that government, which he its harbinger proclaimed, men of all characters were now anxious and eager to partake. Still, he observed, the ancient law did not fail, as if it had not answered the end; for it received its completion in the Gospel, which fulfilled the types and prophecies, and enforced the moral commands. In some points, particularly with respect to the sacred and inviolable bond of marriage, they themselves explained away or perverted its meaning, and he reproved them as guilty of adultery in divorcing their wives for every trifling cause of disgust.

Let us beware of the spirit of the Pharisees, and not be satisfied, as they were, with certain external observances in religion. It is possible, we see, that those, who pretend to be very zealous for duties, may be lamentably defective, and allow themselves in gross violations of the divine precepts. Let us inquire, then, how far our principles and practices agree. The highest veneration for the law should dispose us, not to reject, but embrace, the Gospel. They both come from the same God, and harmonize in the same glorious plan. The Christian revelation is, indeed, the perfection of every preceding economy,

and by this especially God establishes the kingdom of his Son. Do we wish to secure its blessings? Then we are required to exert all the faculties of our souls; for "every man presseth into it." The faint desire, the unoperative resolution, will leave us short of heaven; the possession of it is not to be gained

without a holy violence.

Before the same audience, and in order to enforce the foregoing admonitions, Jesus proceeded to deliver an affecting parable. He described the future miseries which will follow a life of carnal indulgence, though pleasant for a season, and the everlasting blessedness to which the servant of God shall be admitted, however afflicted upon earth. A rich man is represented, expending his fortune merely for the support of an elegant appearance and a luxurious table. His plan was, to allow himself every gratification which his income would afford; but, while he consulted only his own wishes, he considered not the necessities of others. A poor beggar, named Lazarus, incapacitated for any labour by a diseased body, was placed before his door, imploring relief. This distressed object was neglected, except by the dogs, who licked his sores, as if they were more compassionate than their master: but even this circumstance showed his calamitous situation, since he was covered with ulcers, which were exposed to the open air, and at the same time he could hardly obtain the smallest crums for his subsistence. Death, however, soon put an end to the sufferings of the one, and the enjoyments of the other; and then how different their condition! Lazarus, who was dear to God, notwithstanding his extreme indigence, was conducted by a company of heavenly spirits to a distinguished abode in the kingdom of bliss and glory. The rich epicure might have the parade of a pompous funeral, but his grandeur followed him no farther. He was cast into hell, and there consigned to the

torment of everlasting fire; while the view of Lazarus's happiness and exaltation increased his own misery. He petitioned that the once-despised beggar might be sent to alleviate the excruciating agonies which he endured from the fierceness of the flames; but this could not be granted. Deliverance from his pain, and even the smallest abatement of it, was denied: an impassable gulf separated him from the society of the blessed; and he, who had before enjoyed every delicacy, could not then obtain a drop of

water to cool his parched tongue.

Five brethren still survived him, and all trod in the very same steps. He begged therefore that a special messenger might be sent from the world of spirits to warn them of those extreme sufferings which awaited them. Perhaps he had been instrumental to their profligacy; and the desire of preventing their destruction might arise from a fear of its aggravating his torment. The request, however, was refused, on this ground, that the testimony of the inspired writers was sufficient for their conviction, and that those who rejected such an evidence would give no credit even to a witness rising from the dead.

The whole representation is tremendous, and yet most instructive. Who now will plead for a life devoted to pleasure and sensual purposes? Who will presume to say there can be no harm in expending our fortune upon ourselves; or that no bad consequences will result from the gratification of our wishes, provided our income will support it? Our Lord has shown that by such a conduct the trust reposed in us is betrayed, the poor neglected, God forgotten and provoked, the soul debased and ruined, and a fire kindled against us, which will "burn to the lowest hell," and which never can be quenched. Will not "the sinners in Zion be afraid, and fearfulness surprise the hypocrites?" Ah! "who among

us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings \*?"

We congratulate the faithful servants of God, though destitute as Lazarus. You possess a happiness beyond the reach of the world, of which no afflictions can deprive you. Though you can hardly procure the meanest fare or the coarsest apparel; and though, while your diseased bodies can scarcely endure the hardships of hunger, nakedness, and cold, you are the scorn of your opulent neighbours; yet we will call you blessed. Death, which strikes a terror into others, may inspire you with confidence and joy. For then you shall obtain perfect deliverance, and be " carried by angels into Abraham's bosom."

Is it supposed that stronger evidence is wanted to convince men of the dangerous tendency of sin? The sacred Scriptures declare it, with all the strength and clearness of which language is capable. The testimonies of departed spirits, who have entered upon the invisible world, are withheld from us, and we have no right to ask for them, or to conclude that they would be at all regarded by unbelievers. Let the word of God then be fairly consulted, and its decisions implicitly received, or else we shall soon feel those torments which we are unwilling to credit.

After this interesting parable, Jesus addressed himself again to his disciples, suggesting certain cautions and directions for their conduct t. Some of these things had been said before, but their importance rendered the repetition expedient and needful. He warned them against giving any cause of offence to others, observing, that though, in such a world as this, among creatures so constituted as we now are, cases of that kind may be expected, yet they are attended with awful consequences. It is abundantly better to suffer any calamity, and even to be cut off

<sup>\*</sup> Isa. xxxiii. 14. + Luke xvii. 1, &c.

by a violent death, than to bring a reproach on the good ways of God, or to occasion the meanest of his people to depart from them. In an especial manner, he exhorted them to beware of an angry and implacable disposition, since this would be peculiarly disgraceful to the Gospel, and declared that their forgiveness of injuries should be unlimited. How necessary for ourselves is this solemn counsel! "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil \*:" for inconceivable mischief may result from any wrong practices or tempers observed in your deportment. Many may be prejudiced against the truth, and some so staggered as entirely to renounce it, when they perceive that it produces so little influence upon you. A contentious and quarrelsome spirit is particularly unsuitable to your character; for, though frequent occasions of complaint may occur, you are to "suf-fer long and be kind," and thus to prove that the Gospel which you receive is a system of peace and love.

The Apostles, it should seem, being affected by a sense of their great difficulties, and their inability to surmount them through the weakness of their religious principles, earnestly prayed unto the Lord that he would increase their faith. For, such is the efficacy of this grace, that it will bear up the soul against the severest trials, strengthen for the most arduous services, preserve in temptation, and sanctify our inward dispositions. But how frequently is it obstructed in its operations! If the near attendants and most honoured servants of Jesus lamented their deficiency in this respect, surely the most eminent believers now may with peculiar propriety exclaim, "Lord increase our faith!"

Jesus reminded them that the least degree of it, though small as a grain of mustard-seed, will produce woulderful effects, and enable the Christian to per-

<sup>\*</sup> Psal. xevii. 10.

form duties, which would otherwise be as impossible as the transplanting of a tree into the midst of the ocean. Yet he taught them, after all their exertions, to assume no merit to themselves, but to acknowledge that their obedience to God in every point was no more than he had a right to demand, and that, as it added nothing to him, it gave them no claim upon him. According to this description, we all are the servants of Jehovah, the great and sovereign Lord, and should attend to our proper work till it be finished, not looking for our complete rest and enjoyment before we have done the business assigned us; and even then we shall deserve nothing. Surely a slight knowledge of ourselves will dispose us to confess that "we are unprofitable servants;" nav. remembering what we are, we shall not be unwilling to own that we are miserable offenders.

Jesus continued to prosecute his journey to Jerusalem through Samaria and Galilee, and scattered blessings as he went. Near to a certain village, into which he was about to enter, ten unhappy persons, afflicted with leprosy, presented themselves before him. They stood, indeed, at a distance, as was required of them, lest others should be defiled by their loathsome disorder. It was not, however, too far for the voice of the supplicant. Having heard of the power and grace of Jesus, they implored his merciful regard. He looked on them with compassion, and instantly directed them to show themselves to the priests, who alone were authorized to decide when the malady was removed. They obeyed his word in the believing expectation of a cure, and, as they were going, were healed. The influence of our great Restorer of life and health extended to the remotest places, as well as to the objects immediately within his view. The same miracle was wrought upon them all; but only one of them, it should seem, and he a Samaritan, was properly affected

with it. He returned to proclaim the kindness of his Benefactor, and his own obligations to him. With admiring and grateful adoration he bowed at his feet, and with a loud voice gave glory to God. This instance of faith and love in a Samaritan, a stranger to the commonwealth of Israel, was a striking reproof to the rest. He, therefore, obtained the peculiar approbation of the Saviour, and was dis-

missed in peace. Have we been the subjects of Christ's healing power? Has not the leprosy of sin spread its poisonous infection over our souls? And shall we not cry to him, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us?" Those, surely, who are restored by his grace, cannot but be thankful: yet, alas! none of them feel so lively a sense of his goodness as they ought. Is there one out of ten, who gives glory to God with proper energy and zeal? And is not ingratitude, on such an occasion, most detestable? You, who have experienced deliverance by the power of Jesus, return to praise him; and commend him to the notice and esteem of others, while, with astonishment and love, you declare what

he has done for you.

Perhaps he was arrived at the great city, or, at least, was in the neighbourhood, when the Pharisees inquired of him at what time God would establish. the kingdom, of which he had spoken so much. He replied, that they were deceived about the nature of this kingdom; that it would not be attended with such external pomp and grandeur as to excite general observation; but that, being inward and spiritual, it existed in the hearts of his people. He suggested also to his disciples, that they would soon be longing for his appearance, in vindication of their despised cause, but warned them not to be misled by impostors, who should arise in great numbers. He declared, indeed, that after his passion, then approaching, he would manifest himself in a most awful manner, to take vengeance on his enemies; and that, coming suddenly and terribly as the lightning, he would confound and destroy them. He foretold that many would be cut off in the midst of their business, their gaiety, and sensuality, as in the days of Noah and of Lot, when thousands perished, in the former case by the flood, and in the latter by fire and brimstone from heaven. And, as this tremendous desolation should be accomplished so quickly, he directed his disciples to flee for their lives, at the very first commencement of the troubles, without attempting to secure any of their possessions. He warned them to remember Lot's wife, lest they also, through an attachment to worldly things, should be involved in the general ruin. He predicted that in this public devastation the most painful separations would be made, the nearest friends divided, the most intimate connexions broken; so that, where two persons should be rescued by a peculiar act of grace, and the other left to perish.

It was inquired where the terrible destruction would take place; and our Lord replied by a proverbial expression, that the eagles would be gathered to the carcass. This seemed a plain intimation that the Romans, whose ensigns bore the image of the eagle, should be the instruments of that calamity, and that they would fly as those ravenous birds to their prey. It might also be intended to imply, that, wherever obstinate sinners are marked for ruin, the judgments of God will find them out, and hasten with an unerring aim to accomplish their perdition.

The awful subject will be afterwards resumed. For the present, we observe, that the prophecies of Jesus, which clearly referred to one signal event, were all in due time exactly accomplished. Jerusalem was given up to entire desolation, the unbelieving Jews perished miserably, and the Christians, obeying

our Lord's directions, obtained a memorable deliverance. Are we not, then, here instructed, that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God\*?" And should we not be solicitous to provide a refuge for ourselves, against that day of more terrible calamity, when "the vials of the wrath of God shall be poured out" upon all impenitent sinners, and there shall be no escape? Jerusalem was destroyed for its contempt and rejection of the Gospel; and, if God be still jealous for the honour of his Son, what has Great Britain to expect? O may we know the time of our visitation, and embrace the offers of mercy which are held out to us in the Saviour!

We inquire, then, with serious concern, of all to whom the word of truth is preached, Are you members of the kingdom of God? Is it set up "within you?" It is declared to be "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost †." Have you understood what these blessings mean, so as to feel the efficacy in your own hearts? If not, you are as much strangers, in reality, to the character of Jesus, and as certainly obnoxious to the divine vengeance, as the unbelieving Jews. O, flee from the tremendous storm, while yet there is a possibility of escape! Be willing to make use of the appointed refuge, that, when the destroying Angel unsheaths the sword, you may be protected from the stroke of justice.

Probably with a view to encourage his disciples under the prospect of their approaching difficulties, Jesus exhorted them to pray, and to urge their requests with unceasing ardour ‡. Let us attend to his counsel: "Men ought ALWAYS to pray," at all times, and in all the various circumstances of life. Though many difficulties attend the practice of the duty, and our petitions seem to be rejected, we are "not to faint." Our fears may suggest that "God hath forgotten to be gracious," and that it were vain to hope

<sup>\*</sup> Heb. x. 31. + Rom. xiv. 17. ± Luke xviii. 1-14.

for his mercy; yet we are here taught to renew our applications with fresh vigour, and "give him no rest" till he vouchsafe to grant us deliverance and comfort.

The efficacy of such continued fervour in our addresses to God is exhibited in a short parable. A poor distressed widow, under great oppression, earnestly solicited the interference of a magistrate in her behalf, that she might obtain justice. He, being destitute of every good principle both toward God and man, refused for some time to undertake her cause; but at length he consented, merely that he might be freed from the trouble of her importunity. Jesus has directed us to draw the proper conclusion from this little history. The Lord God may seem regardless of the incessant cries of his afflicted people for a considerable season; but still they should persevere in their ardent supplications, and expect his gracious interposition. Like holy Jacob, they should wrestle with him, and say, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Then will he rescue them from the oppression of their spiritual enemies, and satisfy the desires of their souls. Yet, great as this encouragement is, how few are animated by it! Do not some appear so disheartened, and so "faint in their minds," as to grow remiss, and almost abandon their hope? Thus Jesus lamented, that, upon his coming, he should find but little faith on the earth. And, should this be the day of his visitation among ourselves, we fear that the number of firm and lively believers would be proved to be small indeed. Ah! why do we distrust his promise? Or, if we maintain our dependence upon it, why do we give way to so many distressing apprehensions? Why are we so backward to the duty of prayer; so cold and languid in the performance? Surely we treat the Lord as if we thought that he would not be true to his word.

Another parable, addressed to those who boasted

of their own goodness, and looked down with contempt upon others, instructs us with what temper of mind we should make our approaches to God. We may draw near with confidence, in reliance on the Saviour; but not with presumption, as if we had a claim upon him, on the ground of our own merit. We are taught to bow before him with the deepest humiliation and abhorrence of ourselves, confessing our iniquity, and imploring forgiveness through his free and abundant mercy, as revealed in the Gospel. This is represented in the case of two men, a Pharisee and a publican, who went to worship at the temple. Their principles and dispositions were widely different; and very different also was

the effect of their prayers.

The Pharisee stood by himself, with much selfsufficiency, as if he should be polluted by coming near the publican. His devotions, if such they may be called, contained not one petition; and, though he pretended to thank God, his object was to compliment himself, while he described his own excellency, and recounted the various services he had performed. He alleged that he was far better than the generality of mankind; that he had avoided the gross sins in which many others lived, and which might be charged upon the notorious character then present; and that he had also been exact in all ceremonial observances. Such was the detail of his goodness, such the only foundation of his hope towards God. And was not this "sacrifice an abomination unto the Lord?" Yes, a proud spirit is peculiarly odious to him; and he hath determined "that no flesh shall glory in his presence." But are not many, under a Christian profession, worshipping with the temper of the Jewish Pharisee? Let his prayer be translated into modern language, and it would describe precisely the sentiments of numbers among us. We have many who compare themselves with others, who boast of

their virtue, their freedom from scandalous crimes, and their strict performance of certain customary rites. But what shall we say? Shall we not remark, as before, that, so long as they exalt themselves, their most specious offerings, whether of charity or devotion, are offensive to God?

Another character, however, is here exhibited, and that of an acceptable worshipper. The publican, or Roman tax-gatherer, whose former life, it is probable, had been stained with many enormities, was compelled under the terror of an awakened conscience to humble himself in the presence of God, and to deprecate his vengeance. He stood at a distance from the sanctuary, and with eyes cast down upon the ground; thus expressing his unworthiness to draw near or look up to God. Nor was such demeanour the only evidence of his feelings. Smiting upon his breast, through extreme anguish for his accumulated guilt, and confessing himself a sinner obnoxious to justice, without offering any plea in his own favour, he prayed, that, if it were possible, God would extend his mercy to him. To such a contrite penitent as this, however flagitious his conduct may have been, the promises of the Gospel are addressed. "Let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon \*." This the publican found; he went down to his house in peace, having obtained acceptance with God. How instructive, how animating, is the example! It is recorded for our encouragement; and the declaration is added, to revive the heart of all those who are ready to despond, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." For this abundant grace, indeed, we are indebted to Him, who "died for the ungodly," and whose "blood cleanseth from all sin." Our application to God must be made in his name, and in dependence on his merits. But even the interposition of Christ will not avail us, unless we feel that "godly sorrow which worketh repentance," and that deep humiliation which the publican expressed. We may have been preserved from gross offences; but, if we be truly sensible of our guilt, we shall not be unwilling to be considered on a level with the worst of characters, in the point of our acceptance with God, nor will any other prayer suit us so well as that which is here provided, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

## JESUS CHRIST.

## SECT. 28.

Jesus, attending of the feast of dedication, gave sight to a man born blind—revealed himself to him, when excommunicated—described himself as the Door, and the good Shepherd—declared his union with the Father, and miraculously escaped from being stoned.

Jesus had now taken his leave of Galilee, and arrived at Jerusalem. There he attended at the celebration of a certain festival, which is supposed to have been kept in remembrance of the purification of the temple by Judas Maccabeus\*. This was an institution only of human authority; but he did not on that account neglect it, and he has taught us by his example to pay a serious respect to those observances which tend to the advancement of religion, even though they be not established by the divine command.

In such a world as this, objects of wretchedness present themselves on every side: but we may learn from Jesus not to look on the distressed without feeling the tenderest emotions of compassion. As he passed through the streets of Jerusalem, he beheld with merciful regard a poor beggar, who had been blind from his birth †. The disciples, taking notice of the unhappy case, proposed a question of curious speculation. They asked whether the calamity was not to be considered as a peculiar judgment from God, for some heinous transgression committed either by the man or his parents. Possibly they entertained

<sup>\*</sup> John x. 22. 1 Mac. iv. 59. Joseph. Antiq. B. xii. ch. 11.

the idea of a pre-existent state, and supposed that the sufferings of this life are punishments for former sins. The Jews, at least, are said to have imbibed that absurd notion from the doctrines of certain

Heathen philosophers.

Jesus, however, without entering into a subtle disquisition upon the case, declared that the affliction was appointed, not as a judicial visitation for any remarkable offence, but that the mighty power of God should be displayed by its miraculous removal. He further observed, that his time of service in this world, which he knew to be very short, must be diligently improved, in order to promote the great end of his mission; and that he should continue, during his abode here, to give light to them that were in darkness. Let us make the application to our-We, who are sinners, should always consider that we deserve to bear distinguishing marks of the divine indignation. Wheresoever we perceive a poor sufferer, oppressed by heavy calamities, let us not curiously inquire into his crimes, but attend to our own, which merit a like, if not a severer visitation. It may reconcile our minds to the most painful afflictions to remember what our Lord intimates, that they may be designed to promote the praise and glory of God. Let us not forget how soon our day of labour and of usefulness will be closed, that we may exert ourselves with vigour for the benefit of others. If the Saviour shone as "the light of the world," what are our obligations? Are we not bound to fulfil the purposes of the life which is given us? Shall we depart to the awful reckoning before these are answered? If we would imitate our great Exemplar, we must not trifle away the few remaining moments in sensuality or supineness, or omit any one opportunity of rendering assistance to our fellow-creatures.

Jesus not only attended to the cries of the distressed, but in some cases granted relief where it was not so-

licited, as in the instance before us. We observe, too, that, though all his miracles were illustrious, they were performed in different ways. In some a word or a touch sufficed; in others certain means were made use of, but such as magnified his mighty power. He anointed the man's eyes with clay: but this, it must be allowed, seemed more likely to take away than communicate sight. He then commanded him to wash in the pool of Siloam; and instantly, upon this being done, the cure was accomplished. The efficacy, however, should not be ascribed to any peculiar virtue in those waters, but to Him, whom by their significant name they typified, "the Sent" of God. He alone, who ordered this singular expedient, could render it successful. The same, we may remark, is evident with respect to his other appointments. The ordinances of his church are, indisputably, weak in themselves, and unable to impart any blessing to the soul. But he is pleased to confer grace upon those who frequent them in obedience to his directions, and in dependence on his promise. Let us therefore conform to his institutions with the simplicity of unfeigned faith, and his power will be therein displayed for the relief of all our spiritual necessities.

The miracle was manifest, and it could not but engage the public notice, as the man whose sight was restored was generally known. All were astonished, but some were enraged; in consequence of which, pains were taken to disprove the fact, or by some means to cast an odium upon Jesus. This malignant opposition, however, tended to confirm the evidence, and publish it the more extensively. In like manner, modern infidels, by their hatred of the Gospel, and assiduous attempts to invalidate its testimony, do really advance the cause which they mean to injure; and the more they resist God, the more his truth is established, and they themselves are confounded.

The man was summoned before the sanhedrim,

and closely examined concerning the change he had experienced, which he described with the most artless simplicity, and from which he declared that he considered the author of it as a Prophet. This occasioned a division in the council; some, with hypocritical sanctity, pretending that Jesus had profaned the sabbath, because he had performed the miracle on that holy day, and therefore that he could not be of God; while others were constrained to acknowledge, from the evidence before them, that he could not possibly be an impostor. Some unfairness or collusion being suspected, endeavours were used to discover the trick. The man's parents, therefore, were called, and strictly questioned. The fact, indeed, they openly asserted, and yet, through the fear of excommunication (which all were threatened with who should confess Jesus to be the Messiah), they dared not avow their own convictions, but referred their examiners to the testimony of their son.

He was again interrogated by the rulers; and, while they with vehemence and bitterness reviled the Saviour, as a worthless and profane wretch, the poor beggar ventured to plead his cause with confidence. He maintained before them all that the miracle was undeniable, and the conclusion from it reasonable, that Jesus must have received his commission from Heaven. This provoked them the more; and instantly, without any other charge of guilt, they passed the very severe sentence of excommunication upon him.

Whether, now, shall we most pity, the condemned person, or his judges? Ah! how odious their conduct, how miserable their case, who, with incontestable evidence before them, still hardened their hearts, and determined not to be convinced! He, though destitute of the advantages of education, and in a great measure ignorant of the real character of Christ, dared to act agreeably to his conscience, and

refused to depart from his testimony, whatever he might suffer. We ask, then, Where are those, who have courage enough, in the face of opposition, to vindicate the character of Jesus? Can you speak of any benefit which you have received from him? Though unable to maintain an argument against subtle disputants, can you declare that he has communicated light to your mind, and say, as the poor beggar, if you can add no more, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see?" By such a simple evidence as this, many an unlettered peasant has pleaded the cause of Christ with great success, and sometimes to the confusion of the most learned adversaries. But it may expose you to reproach and bitter persecution. Be it so. What have you to fear, while you stand up for the honour of the Saviour? It is a service of which you should not be ashamed, and in which you need not dread any consequences. Do not, therefore, shrink from it, or, as the man's parents, put it off to another; but come forth, and avow yourselves the disciples of Jesus, whoever may, on that account, exclude you from their society. He, whose interest you espouse, will manifest his favourable regard to you in due season.

The poor outcast, it should seem, understood but little of Jesus; yet, being faithful to his convictions, he obtained further information. The Saviour sought after him, that he might reveal himself to him. Upon being asked, therefore, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" he confessed his ignorance, but showed, at the same time, that he was a serious inquirer after the truth, and eagerly desirous of instruction. Accordingly, no sooner had Jesus explicitly declared himself to be that exalted Character, than he cried out, with a holy rapture, "Lord, I believe;" and, to testify his unfeigned submission and dependence, he bowed down in devout adoration of him. Thus he received a double cure, and exhibited, by the change

wrought both in his body and soul, unquestionable proofs of the power and grace of the Redeemer. How seasonable was this manifestation to the excommunicated man, while he suffered under the severe and injurious sentence! The Lord will administer the necessary support and consolation to those who seek him in sincerity; and he will select the most suitable time and method for that purpose. Fear not, therefore, you who are faithfully devoted to him, whatever may come upon you in his service. We need not say, when the profane world turn away from you with scorn, but even when your dearest friends cast you off, for the truth's sake, he will prevent you from sinking under the trouble, and perhaps he may then favour you with peculiar discoveries of his salvation. In this confidence the royal Psalmist triumphed, "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up \*."

But should the question be proposed to us individually, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" what answer could we return? Are not many, who assume the Christian profession, as far from the faith of Christ as if they had never heard his name? If, however, with a teachable disposition, we ask, how we are to conceive of him, or what regard is due to him,

he himself will instruct us.

In addressing the man to whom he had given sight, he conveyed both information and encouragement, while he observed, that one grand design of his appearance was, to communicate the light of life to all who feel and lament that they are destitute of it. But he added, that he came also for judgment, as well as mercy, to expose their folly, who boasted of their own understanding, and to seal them up in ignorance, who were too wise to be taught. Certain of the Pharisees, it should seem, were present at the latter part of this declaration; and, considering them-

<sup>\*</sup> Psal. xxvii. 10.

selves as charged, by an oblique reference, with spiritual blindness, they were disgusted. It must needs be offensive to the pride of those, who have acquired a reputation for learning and discernment, to be treated as intellectually dark, and having the same need of divine illumination as the most illiterate. Jesus, therefore, warned them, that they could not plead in excuse for themselves the want of information, and that a conceit of their own knowledge chiefly kept them in unbelief, and greatly aggravated their guilt and condemnation. This, surely, may furnish a forcible exhortation to us, that we "lean not unto our own understanding," and that we pray earnestly not to be given over to a judicial blindness, but, by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, to discover "the truth as it is in Jesus."

Our Lord continued his address, with a particular view to those false teachers, who rejected him \*. Speaking in parabolical language, he declared, by a solemn asseveration, that whosoever enters into the fold any other way than by the appointed door, is to be considered as an injurious and destructive intruder. He described the real shepherd, as approaching by the regular access which alone can be allowed, and gaining immediate admission. To such an one the care of the sheep is intrusted: he watches over them with a tender regard to their different cases and necessities; and they acknowledge him as their guide, supporter, and defender. But they will not pay the same respect to him who is not thus connected with them, and yields not a due attention to their concerns. This was indeed an awful reproof of the Pharisees, who pretended to instruct the people, and yet understood not the only instituted method of salvation; and it was an intimation, that, whatever character they assumed, the true members of the church would not submit to them, but turn away from them with disgust. Yet they saw not the drift of the parable; and therefore Jesus spake in plainer language to the

following effect :-

" I myself am that Door to which I referred: and it is necessary that every one, who would be a teacher of others, should be properly acquainted with my mediatorial office, and cordially devoted to my service. There have been those who have urged the same claims before, and many have presumed to mark out for their disciples a different course from that which I prescribe; but they were deceivers and usurpers, whose object was their own gain, and not the good of the flock. The faithful people of God, however, have always discovered the ruinous delusion, and refused to be led by their influence. I am the only way of admission into the church; and he, who approaches to God in a real dependence upon me, shall be protected from all assaults of enemies, and shall find abundant support and comfort for his soul in the rich provisions of the Gospel. The arrogant intruder into the sacred function of the ministry is a destroyer and murderer of immortal souls. But the purpose for which I am come is to bestow salvation in a larger measure than has ever vet been known upon the earth.

"I, therefore, perform the office of 'the good Shepherd,' and am the very Person described by the ancient prophets under that title\*: my people shall enjoy security and happiness, through my affectionate care for them; and I will render them every attention and service which the most vigilant and compassionate shepherd can yield to his flock. Circumstances of peculiar danger may occur, which will try the strength of his regard for the sheep. In such situations, the man who has no property or concern in them will not expose himself for their defence, but leave them to be dispersed and devoured by every beast of prey;

<sup>\*</sup> Isa. x!, 1. Ezek. xxxiv. 23. xxxvii. \$4. Mic. v. 4.

while the real owner, who feels an attachment to them, will stand by them in all extremities, and hazard his safety that he may ward off the assaults

of the destroyer."

"This is the character which I sustain for the benefit of my redeemed ones: and as a mutual love subsists between me and them, similar to that which the Father and I bear to each other, so, in the sincerity and fervour of my affection, I cheerfully give up my own life, to rescue them from perdition. My flock also extends beyond the limits of your nation: there are those among the Gentiles, however hopeless they may appear, who shall obey the call, and be incorporated into my church, that all believers may constitute one society, under the care and protection of the same exalted Head. The Father himself is pleased with my attention to the welfare of my people, and with my voluntary undertaking for them. It is, therefore, our settled plan, and a part of the commission which I have received from him, that I should die, and rise again. Of my own accord I lay down that life, which I could easily retain against all the violence of men and devils; and by the same sovereign power I can resume it, since it is not possible that I should be imprisoned in the grave, contrary to my own will."

How interesting is the whole of this address! Who among us can be unconcerned about an admission into the fold of God, or the only possible mode of procuring that admission? Have we, then, diligently inquired for this appointed way; and do we consent to make use of it? It is more especially incumbent upon the teachers of religion to examine their principles. As they would dread the condemnation of the ancient Pharisees, and the odious appellation of "thieves and robbers," they should seriously consider with what motives they assumed the sacred character. Have they been actuated by an unfeigned regard

to Christ? Is he the sole ground of their dependence? And is it the grand object of their ministry to display his grace, and exalt his glory? Very mischievous indeed are the effects which result from such persons undertaking to instruct others as are themselves ignorant of the salvation of God. Many, many precious souls are deluded to their eternal ruin. Let us pray, therefore, that "the church, being alway preserved from false apostles, may be ordered and guided by faithful and true pastors, through Jesus Christ our Lord\*"

"The good Shepherd" can never be unmindful of his flock. Let us contemplate this description of him till we feel an increasing strength and liveliness of faith and hope, of love and joy. How amazing is that compassion, which induced him to take notice of our wretched case! How should that depth of humiliation and suffering, to which he submitted for our recovery, endear him to us! How should that tenderness of regard, with which he provides for all the various cases of his people, encourage our trust, and inspire us with confidence! But are we indeed "the sheep of his pasture?" Have we heard his voice, recalling us from our wanderings; and are we now content to abide in his fold? In dependence on him, do we go in and out, and feed upon the rich pastures of his grace? "All we, like sheep, have gone astray;" let us "now return unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls+," and pray that others also, though far off, may be brought nigh, and made one with us in him.

Our Lord's declarations produced different sentiments in his hearers. Some turned away from him with disgust, and in a contemptuous manner derided him as a demoniac and a madman, unworthy of any serious attention. But there were those who judged more favourably of him, both from the doctrines he

Collect for St. Matthias's Day. + Isa- liii. 6. 1 Pet. ii. 25.

advanced, and the miracles he wrought. Thus, also, the faithful preaching of the Gospel generally creates a division. It is no uncommon thing for men to speak evil of what they understand not, and to vent their enmity against the zealous advocate for Christ, by scornful reproaches similar to those which were cast upon Him. And yet, such is the force of the truth, that, even in the midst of much opposition, some will be so impressed with it, as to exert their influence in its support. Let us "take heed how we hear," and examine for ourselves, without being

biassed by the objections of others.

Jesus was walking in the portico which surrounded the temple, probably soon after his preceding discourse, when many of the Jews came about him, though with no friendly disposition. They desired a still plainer declaration from himself, whether or no he was the Messiah; and it is likely that they wished for it, as a ground of accusation against him. Jesus, therefore, reproved them for their unbelief, in disregarding his former claims, and referred them to his works, for a full demonstration of his divine character. He showed their baseness in continuing to reject him, notwithstanding such accumulated evidence. It was a conduct which clearly proved that they belonged not to that favoured company, the sheep of his flock, all of whom acknowledge him as their Leader and Commander, receiving his doctrines, and obeying his directions. These, however reproached by men, he affirmed to be the objects of his peculiar notice, and secure, under the protection his almighty arm, from the assaults of their most powerful enemies. He has redeemed them to himself, and engaged to rescue them from every danger, and conduct them to the possession of eternal life. He added, that the omnipotence of the Father is pledged for their defence, since he and the Father "are one," not in design only, but in nature and perfection, the same infinite and uncontrollable Being. As Jehovah, therefore, cannot be overcome, his peo-

ple are invincible.

How clear and express the declaration! Mysterious we allow it to be; for we pretend not to comprehend the divine essence, or to explain in what manner this union can subsist. But we maintain the real and proper deity of the Saviour, on the authority of this infallible word; nor dare we make any difference or inequality, where the Scriptures have forbidden it. We confess our obligation to "honour the Son, even as we honour the Father," and derive the strongest hope and consolation from the important doctrine.

This high claim gave great offence; and so it has ever done; but the furious opposition of men ought not to deter us from the cordial reception of the truth of God. The Jews took up stones to stone him, as they had done on a former occasion\*. What a tremendous sight was this! Sinners rising up with murderous rage against the Saviour, and arming themselves for the destruction of "the Holy One of God! Why did he not crush them in a moment, and consume them in their iniquity? Or why does he bear with our perverseness? Only because he is "the Lord, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy†." With astonishing composure and mildness, he stood to expostulate with them on their unreasonable conduct in recompensing all his benevolent actions with such barbarity. They pretended, indeed, a religious zeal; for they considered him, by what he had said, as "making himself equal with God." Now, had they mistaken his meaning, is it not in the highest degree improbable that he should suffer them to continue in such an error, without contradicting it? Yet in his reply he did not renounce, but confirmed and vindicated, his claim.

<sup>\*</sup> John viii. 59.-Sect. 23. + Psal, ciii. 8.

He argued, that kings and rulers were in their Scriptures called "gods\*," as representatives of Jehovah; but that he was infinitely superior to them, and came, in a character peculiar to himself, immediately from the highest heavens; and therefore that he ought not to be treated as a blasphemer for asserting his proper title and dignity. In support of it, he solemaly appealed again to his works, which he called the works of his Father, being such as none but Jehovah could perform, and maintained from them what he had before affirmed, that he and the Father are one. This, surely, was clear and decisive; nor can there need a comment to deduce the Godhead of Christ from these repeated declarations. The Jews understood him as advancing this very doctrine, though they determined, through their pride and ignorance to reject it; and therefore they renewed their attempts to destroy him. By a miracle, however, as on other similar occasions+, he escaped from their violence, since he had yet a few months longer to continue his labours on the earth.

A proper opportunity is here offered us to warnthose of their danger who oppose the divinity of the Son of God. Beware, lest, sinning as the Jews did, you "fall after the same example of unbelief." If their spirit and conduct were so odious, can yours be acceptable to him? Your error, if persevered in, will be destructive; for you cannot possess right affections towards the Saviour, nor yield him that reverence and submission which he demands, unless you acknowledge that he "is over all, God blessed for ever ‡."

<sup>\*</sup> Psal. lxxxii. 6. It is supposed by some that magistrates obtained this high appellation only as types of the Redeemer, and as an intimation that He would really be very God in himself, whereas they were styled so merely with a reference to him. Accordingly, our Lord's argument has been expounded with a view to this sense; and the interpretation certainly deserves serious consideration.

<sup>+</sup> Luke iv. 30. John viii. 59. 1 Rom. x. 5.

For the present he bears with your petulance and folly in resisting his claims; but at length he will arise to vindicate his right, to the everlasting confusion of all his enemies.

We have only to add, that when Jesus withdrew from this persecution at Jerusalem, he retired to a distant part, even beyond Jordan, where John had formerly exercised his ministry. There many resorted to him, having been prepared, as it should seem, by the testimony of the Baptist, to receive him. These therefore, without hesitation, believed on him, while the great and learned at Jerusalem rejected him with scorn. Thus the sin of some persons may eventually become the salvation of others. kingdom of God," when taken from those who oppose, is given to such as will thankfully submit to it. Happy the people beyond Jordan, who were favoured with the presence of the Saviour, because they knew the time of their visitation! Let us fear for ourselves and our country, lest our perverseness should provoke him to depart from us; and therefore let us vield all serious attention to the word of truth, which we hear. O Lord, withdraw not the Gospel of thy grace, nor the influence of thy Spirit, from us! Here fix thine abode, and make us willing and obedient in the day of thy power. May we be added as faithful members to thy church on earth, and conducted to thy heavenly kingdom, there to behold thy glory, and praise thee as one with the Father, world without end! Amen.

## JESUS CHRIST.

## **SECT. 29.**

Jesus answered inquiries about divorces—showed a tender regard to little children—replied to a young ruler—warned his disciples of the danger of riches—delivered the parable of the labourers in the vine-yard—hastened to Jerusalem to suffer—cured two blind men near Jericho.

The enemies of Christ, even while they seem to prevail, are subservient to his purposes: by their opposition to the truth, they are eventually the cause of its more extensive promulgation. Thus, we have seen, when Jesus was driven away from Jerusalem, the people beyond Jordan received the benefit of his ministry. To them he imparted his blessings with a liberal hand; for he was followed by great multitudes, whom he instructed in the mysteries of his kingdom, and healed of their various bodily diseases \*.

Hither also the malice of the Pharisees pursued him. They came with an intention of drawing him into some difficulty, or of prejudicing the people against him. They pretended to consult him on the subject of divorces, and asked whether it were allowable for a man to dismiss his wife for every trifling reason. He knew their malevolent designs, and yet condescended to answer their inquiries. He referred them to the original institution of marriage, as delivered in their own Scriptures, with which, he argued, the separations so prevalent among them

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xix. 1-12. Mark x. 1-12.

were totally inconsistent. To this it was objected, that Moses had countenanced those divorces by an express law for the purpose \*. Jesus replied, that a permission of that kind had indeed been granted to their nation, "on account of the hardness of their hearts," which might have produced worse mischiefs, but that such a toleration was repugnant to the first

appointment of the sacred union.

The disciples resumed the subject in private, when he solemnly declared, that, if either of the parties so bound together put away the other (excepting only for the cause of unfaithfulness), and entered into a fresh connexion, it was adultery in the sight of God. The representation appeared so severe, that they judged it advisable to decline an engagement which could not be annulled. But this was a wrong conclusion: for our Lord observed, that, though various reasons might lead men to celibacy, it should not be imposed upon any, and that those, who preferred it with a view of devoting themselves more entirely to God, should possess peculiar grace, suited to the circumstances of that state.

This may seem an uninteresting topic to some readers: but the licentiousness of the present age renders it in an especial manner necessary. "Marriage is honourable in all †:" yet few, we apprehend, proceed to it under the influence of right motives, in the fear of God, or with a real regard to their spiritual welfare. A sudden and capricious attachment, the gratification of libidinous desires, worldly expectations or convenience, are the grounds on which most persons connect themselves together; and in such cases, as there is no firmness of virtuous principle, the bond of union is more liable to be broken. Disappointments ensue, disgust arises, a freedom of intercourse becomes irksome, a separation is eagerly wished for, and consequences, most de-

<sup>\*</sup> Deut. xxiv. 1. + Heb. xiii. 4.

structive to religion and society, take place. How frequent are such instances among us, particularly in what is called fashionable life! So numerous are the applications for divorces to one branch of our legislature, as to constitute no small part of the deliberations of that august body. The many examples of contention and impurity, which are thus brought to light, stain the records of Parliament, disgrace our profession of the Gospel, and expose our nation to the judgments of an incensed God.

How much care and circumspection, then, are necessary in the choice of a partner, with whom we are to spend our days! If we would attain real and abiding happiness in such a connexion, it is indispensably requisite that our inclinations be regulated according to the will of God, that we seek his direction and blessing, and aim at his glory. Those, also, who are bound together by the marriage covenant, should maintain a constant vigilance over themselves, lest, by any part of their spirit and conduct, they should excite disgust in each other, and render their union painful. Let them learn to "bear one another's burdens," and, by the exercise of patience, forbearance, and love, promote their mutual comfort and advancement in the road to heaven.

The dread of inconveniences and trials should not, however, deter men from that which is God's own institution, and for which our very nature is formed. Few, we fear, continue single on real principles of religion: few possess the grace which is necessary for that state. The celibacy of many, it is evident, leads to licentiousness; and therefore it is their sin and reproach. While they boast of their liberty, and rove at large for the indulgence of their passions, they are hastening their own perdition, and with much assiduity laying snares for the unwary, whose bodies and souls are sacrificed for a vile and

momentary gratification. What aggravated guilt is

During our Lord's continuance in the same neighbourhood, the inhabitants regarded him with such veneration, that many presented to him their tender offspring, who were not capable of profiting by his instructions, requesting his solemn benediction and devout intercessions for them \*. The disciples would have prevented it, and put them from him, unwilling that their Master's time should be occupied with infants, as he had other more important business to employ him. Jesus, however, showed much displeasure at their officious interposition, and commanded that even the youngest children should be allowed a free access to him, inasmuch as the kingdom of God should consist of such members. He declared, also, as he had done before, that no person can belong to that holy community, who is not brought to a simplicity of disposition resembling that of a little child. With the greatest complacency, therefore, and most amiable condescension, he took them up in his arms, and pronounced his blessing on them.

This occurrence may seem trifling, but it is replete with instruction. It should endear the Saviour to us, when we observe such decisive proofs of the meekness and compassion of his character. And, since Jesus allows and invites those of tenderest age to come near unto him, affirming them to be capable of being received into his kingdom, shall we forbid their admission into his church, and exclude those whom he has not excluded? The argument drawn from this passage in favour of infant baptism, though not direct, appears conclusive; for why did he show such a regard to infants, but because they were the proper objects of his care and love, and might partake of his grace? Parents, therefore, may be en-

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xix, 13-15. Mark x. 13-16. Luke xviii. 13-17.

couraged to present their offspring to Christ, and entreat his kind attention to them. They may solemnly devote them to him in his covenant by the initiating ordinance of baptism. That rite is to the father of a Christian family what circumcision was to the father of a Jewish. We believe that our whole house will be an acceptable offering to him, and rejoice that "the promise is unto us and to our children \*."

The representation here given seems particularly suited to engage the notice of our youngest readers, and to such we would apply it. Inconsiderable as you may be thought in the world, you are not beneath the Saviour's regard. Let nothing, then, keep you from his arms, which stand open to receive you. While you hear him say, "Suffer them to come unto me, and forbid them not," be encouraged to have recourse to him, whoever would prevent your approach. Cast yourselves before him, and implore his blessing. Surrender up your hearts, in willing subjection, that he may attach them to himself, and accomplish in you the purposes of his mercy. Though your years have been few, you stand in need of redemption through his blood, and the sanctification of his Spirit; nor will his grace be denied you, while you wait in humble faith and fervent prayer before him.

As he was departing from the place in which the last occurrence happened, a certain person came running to him, evidently with much eagerness, and with profound veneration, acknowledging him as a divine teacher. He kneeled down at his feet, and desired information from him on a subject of all others the most important t. "Good Master," said he, "what good thing shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?" Here, then, was a candidate for hea-

\* Acts ii. 39.

<sup>+</sup> Matt. xix. 16, &c. Mark x. 17—31. Luke xviii. 18—30.

ven, of a most promising appearance. He was young, yet not addicted to sensual pleasures, for he attended with great exactness to the duties of morality, and discovered a serious concern about his future state. He was a ruler, a magistrate of some consequence, and possessed of considerable wealth. Yet, unlike the generality of those in high life, he applied to Jesus, not with a disposition to cavil, but, as it should seem, with a desire of being instructed in the

way of salvation.

The case was hopeful; and, from such a view, we might have been ready to conclude that the man was a real convert. But a little experience will teach us not to be precipitate in our judgment, nor to rest with implicit confidence in any favourable appearances. Jesus, who knew perfectly the bent of his mind, dealt with him in such a way as to show his true character. He inquired, therefore, why he had given him the title of "good," since it properly belonged only to God. He did not thereby disclaim it, or in the least imply that he possessed not the attributes of deity, but examined on what ground the amiable youth had so addressed him, and whether he had done it on a full conviction of his dignity. The ruler, probably, was elated with a conceit of his own goodness, and his ability to do every thing required; on which account, to detect his erroneous notions, and evince his deficiencies, Jesus referred him to the law, assuring him that he must keep the commandments, in order to attain eternal life. We cannot so interpret this declaration as to set aside the necessity of believing in the Son of God for salvation, or ascribe to man a power in himself of yielding a complete obedience to his Maker. But there is a peculiar propriety in putting those, who boast of their own righteousness and strength, upon considering the extent of their duty. We exhort them to bring forth their best performances, that they may

compare them with the appointed rule, and to try what their most vigorous exertions can effect. "Keep the commandments;" but let one precept as well as another be regarded, and that in the utmost extent, so as to regulate your inward affections no less than your outward practice. Such an unfeigned and perfect compliance is required from you at all times and in all circumstances, without weariness or interruption, even to your latest hour. Upon the least failure, you are rendered incapable of being justified by the works of the law, and, though decent and orderly in your conduct, can obtain forgiveness no otherwise than by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, through the blood of his cross.

This young person, not knowing himself and the defects of his obedience, presumptuously boasted that he had, from his earliest years, performed every duty enjoined in the second table, to which he was referred; and, in the vain confidence of his own sufficiency, he then asked whether any thing further could be demanded of him. Ah! how gross the darkness, how fatal the delusion, by which men are so exalted in themselves, as to say, "I am innocent," or, "What lack I yet?" Jesus, however, looked with compassionate regard on the ruler, whose manners and disposition, in some respects, might be peculiarly engaging. But, as he resisted conviction in one way, he proved him in another, requiring a special testimony of the entire submission of his heart to the divine will. "One thing," said he, "thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor; and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me." The strict injunction was more than the youth could bear, but not more than Jesus had a right to ordain: nor would those refuse to comply with it, who are truly sensible of their own

demerit, and the worth of the Saviour. The merchant, who finds the "one pearl of great price," will sell all that he has, and buy it \*: for he will say, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord t." Not so he, whom rank and fortune had ennobled. He was disappointed, grieved, confounded; and instantly betrayed what Jesus meant to detect by the trial here proposed, the secret insincerity of his heart. He gave up all further inquiries about the religion of the Gospel; "he went away sorrowful," mortified with the severity of the injunction, regretting his inability to comply, and, if unwilling to part with his pretensions and his hopes, yet still more reluctant to resign his present attachments. He withdrew, preferring the enjoyment of his large possessions to the grace and salvation of Jesus.

Ah! who can refrain from tears, on account of the promising youth thus departing from Christ, and at length, as we fear, perishing in sin? Yet similar cases frequently occur. We would ask all those, who seem desirous to learn the way to heaven, do you unfeignedly consent to the terms which Jesus requires? He does not, indeed, say to you, "Sell whatsoever thou hast;" but he will certainly call you to make some painful sacrifices, as an evidence of your regard to him. You must, at least, be ready to relinquish the dearest objects in life, if he shall so appoint; nor are any of his disciples exempted from the obligation of taking up the cross, and following him through shame, contempt, and suffering. If you comply not with his demands, whatever they may be, you lack the one thing, an integrity of heart, an unreserved submission to him, for which no compensation can be allowed. Would you, then, depart from him? O, think again what the consequences

<sup>•</sup> Matt. xiii. 46.

<sup>+</sup> Phil. iii. 8.

must be! Those who know your danger tremble and weep for you, though you feel no pity for yourselves.

Jesus, being much affected, directed the attention of all the people, and especially of his disciples, to this occurrence, while he taught them the proper improvement. He declared, such are the snares of riches, such the obstructions which they cause to the spiritual life, that few persons in affluence will be disposed to receive the Gospel, or to pursue that course which alone will conduct them to heaven. Much is to be given up, and many severe struggles to be endured, in all situations; but those whose hearts are attached to their worldly possessions, labour under peculiar difficulties, and it must be a miracle of grace indeed which will enable them to make the necessary sacrifices in the service of God, and for the attainment of his kingdom. The disciples were almost confounded at this intimation, and cried out, with inexpressible astonishment, "Who, then, can be saved?" Jesus replied, that, though the strength of man be insufficient, the power of God will be effectual to accomplish the arduous work. To him, therefore, should our fervent prayers be directed, that by his almighty grace we may resist and overcome the temptations peculiar to our respective circumstances in life.

But, how few are aware of the danger of riches! Instead of fearing, do not almost all eagerly covet, an exalted rank? The affluent, in general, desire no better portion than their temporal possessions, and consider not that these may be the means of excluding them from the happiness of heaven. On the very same principle, also, the poor repine at the appointment of God, when they ought to be thankful that he has placed them in a situation the most favourable to religion. Surely we should be more anxious for spiritual advantages than those which

are merely secular, and pray to be preserved from the love of money, through which so many have forsaken

Christ, and perished eternally.

Upon Peter's remarking that he and his brethren the Apostles had renounced all their worldly occupations, in their attachment to their Master, Jesus assured them, that at the final consummation, when he himself shall appear upon the throne of his glory, they shall obtain a distinguished honour, and sit with him in judgment on the twelve tribes of Israel. He added also, for the encouragement of others, that those, who incur any losses or sufferings for his sake, shall gain an abundant recompense, inasmuch as they shall receive even here what will be a hundred-fold better to them in real substantial happiness, and everlasting life hereafter. Yet, in order to excite a holy jealousy in all his followers, he declared that many, who may now seem the foremost in profession and privileges, shall in the end be found the furthest from God; and that some of those, who are thought the most unlikely to be admitted into heaven, shall shine the brightest in it. O, what "great searchings of heart" should this produce in us! Are we acting agreeably to our high character, and the peculiar advantages we enjoy? Are we not afraid, lest they, upon whom we look down with contempt for their supposed inferiority, should excel us in every good attainment? May not our very opportunities for improvement increase our future condemnation?

To illustrate and confirm the solemn admonition, Jesus delivered a parable \*. He compared the dispensation of the Gospel to the conduct of a certain householder, who hired labourers for a stipulated sum to gather in his vintage. The engagement was made with some of the servants in the morning, but with others at different hours, as at the third, the sixth, the ninth, and even at the eleventh hour. Yet at the

<sup>.</sup> Matt. xx. 1-16.

final reckoning there was no discrimination between them, the last being as acceptable, and receiving the same wages, as the first. This gave great offence; for it was thought unjust that those who had been employed the whole day should obtain no superior distinction above such as had wrought only a small part of it. The master, however, vindicated his own proceeding on this ground, that he had done no injury to any of them, and that, as he had an absolute right to bestow his favours where he pleased, none ought to object to that particular kindness with which some were treated.

We cannot be at a loss for the proper application. The Lord God by his word calls us to a laborious service; and, till we obey that call, we are idle as to the great business of life. He has sent out his messages of mercy to different nations at different periods of the world. The Jews were first admitted into the church; and the Gentiles, though they resembled the workmen who were hired at the last hour, obtained equal privileges. In like manner, also, persons are brought under the influence of divine grace at various ages; some being sanctified from their very infancy, while others, after a long course of profligacy, almost in a dying state, are recovered and saved. Many objections are raised against such a dispensation; and the arrogance of men presumes to call the God of heaven to account. The Jews could not bear that the Heathens should be fellow-heirs with them. The Pharisees, likewise, quarrelled with the Saviour, because publicans and sinners met with a favourable acceptance from him: and to this day there are those who think it dishonourable to his character to take such into his family as have grown old in the service of iniquity.

Is not this conduct, then, to be vindicated? We perceive the sovereignty and freeness of his grace; and ought it not to excite our admiration, love, and praise? Surely he has a right to call what persons,

and by whatsoever methods, he shall please. If we be the distinguished objects of this mercy, we should feel the strongest emotions of gratitude; nor shall we have any cause to complain, though others, in a condition seemingly more desperate, be saved upon the same terms with ourselves, or even be preferred before us. Shall we dictate to him how to dispense those favours which none can claim? And would it not argue an odious malevolence in us to murmur at his extensive kindness towards those who have been most abandoned? If that be our temper, it is probable that some whom we may despise for their ignorance and profaneness may enter into heaven, and we ourselves, with our presumptuous expectations, be for ever cast out. Let us not depend upon an external profession: among the thousands, to whom the Gospel invitation is published, but few comparatively are chosen to final salvation.

At length our Lord departed from the country, to which he had fled, and set out on his last journey to Jerusalem\*. He knew that the appointed time of his sufferings approached; and yet, with a full view of all that was coming upon him, he hastened to finish his work. So great was his ardour in advancing towards the murderous city, where he was to lav down his life, that his disciples, being aware of danger, were filled with amazement, and terrified at the prospect before them, as they followed him in the way. To prepare them for the awful scene, he reminded them of the calamities which awaited him; and predicted, in a clear and circumstantial manner, that he should be betrayed, condemned, delivered to the Roman power, mocked, scourged, spit upon, and taken off by the ignominious and excruciating death of the cross; yet he added, that he should be finally victorious by rising again on the third day. This was a remarkable prophecy, express, and frequently re-

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xx. 17-28. Mark x. 32-46. Luke xviii. 31-34.

peated; but even the twelve could not comprehend its meaning, which was rendered obscure by its repugnance to their prejudices and expectations. Let us contemplate the love of the Redeemer, till our hearts burn within us. How great was his eagerness to accomplish our salvation, since his alacrity and vigour increased as he saw his agonies approaching! Let us not shrink from his service, though we may meet with severe and complicated trials, but go forth with cheerfulness and zeal to the work assigned us, content to "suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together"."

But what do we hear, after this solemn declaration? A most unseasonable petition was presented to Jesus from two of the Apostles. James and John solicited, through their mother, that they might possess the chief posts in his kingdom. Probably they still retained the expectation of his erecting a temporal dominion, and wished to secure the highest preferment. Considering the persons from whom the request came, and the occasion on which it was offered, we cannot but be astonished. Yet the ignorance, pride, and perverseness, which remain in the best characters,

will sufficiently account for the inconsistency.

Jesus very sharply reproved them for their unsuitable and ill-timed application, and warned them that they should soon be called to partake with him of extreme sufferings, which with a vain self-confidence they professed their readiness to do; but he declared that the chief honours of his kingdom were already disposed of in the councils of his Father. The ten other Apostles were also displeased with them for the desire they had expressed; but even in this, it should seem, they too discovered a temper of mind equally blamable, as being actuated by envy and resentment. O Lord, subdue in us all carnal affections! For, while we behold such a strength of

<sup>\*</sup> Rom. viii. 17.

corruption in thy favoured companions, we tremble for ourselves.

There was a suitable occasion, and Jesus embraced it, for inculcating those dispositions and principles which discriminate and adorn his people. He showed, that, instead of that thirst for power and worldly distinctions which prevailed among the Heathens, they should possess a peculiar humility and meekness, a willingness to give up their own ease and consequence, and a readiness to submit to the meanest and most arduous services, for the real interest and happiness of others. He himself had set them an example of this generous condescension, in relinquishing a state of glory, appearing in the very lowest condition upon earth, and consenting to ransom the captive souls of men at the price of his own blood. If we, then, profess to follow the Saviour, we see what tempers become us. And are we willing to forego our own accommodations, that we may render ourselves useful in the world? Is the pride of our hearts subdued? Do we indulge no ambitious desires or expectations? Is "nothing done through strife or vain glory?" And do we "mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate \*?" These inquiries will show that few resemble the meek and suffering Saviour, and that there is very little of genuine practical Christianity among us.

Jesus passed through Jericho towards Jerusalem, and as he went out of that city, attended as usual by a large company, an opportunity was offered for the display of his power and compassion. Two distressed objects †, totally deprived of sight, sat by the road, imploring relief; and, learning that

\* Phil. ii. 3. Rom. xii. 16.

<sup>†</sup> Matt. xx. 29, &c. Mark x. 46, &c. Luke xviii. 35, &c.— St. Mark and St. Luke mention but one of these cares, and St. Mark introduces the very name of this beggar, Bartimeus, the son of Timeus, probably because he was the most noted person, and the chief speaker upon the occasion.

Jesus of Nazareth was at hand (of whose character and miraculous operations they had been previously informed), they exclaimed aloud, professing their faith in him as the promised Messiah, and earnestly soliciting his merciful interposition in their favour. They were reproved by the multitude, and charged to desist from their clamour. Feeling, however, the urgency of their own case, they renewed their petition with the greater importunity, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David!" A cry like this he never disregarded, and therefore, with the most gracious condescension, when he had called them to him, he granted their request. Immediately, by his touch, he restored their sight, and gave a public approbation of their dependence upon him. Nor was this all: his love won their hearts, and constrained them to follow him, while with gratitude and joy they glorified God for their great deliverance.

Are not we, also, under the strongest obligations to adore, and praise, and serve this merciful Redeemer? We cannot too frequently remark that we all stand in need of his help, if not for the cure of an afflicted body, yet for the removal of our spiritual maladies. And here we have an emblem of one great blessing which he bestows, and of his kind attention to every distressed supplicant. He renews our disordered faculties, and refits them for their proper use: He

"openeth the eyes of the blind."

You, therefore, who hear that Jesus passeth by, implore the effectual interposition of his power and compassion in your behalf. O, cry to him, and never cease your importunate requests till he vouchsafe a gracious answer. There are those, perhaps, who will rebuke you, and charge you to desist. But, instead of being thereby deterred, be excited to pray the more fervently, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on us." He will listen to your voice, and permit you to spread your wants before him. Is it not your desire that he

would communicate spiritual light to your minds? He will readily grant it, if only you can depend upon him. Then, having obtained the object of your petition, endeavour to show your gratitude to your heavenly Benefactor. Follow him in the way wherein he leads, praise him for his mercy, and testify his goodness to others, that they also may be induced to give glory to his name. The Son of David is worthy to receive all honour, and love, and worship, and obedience, throughout all generations. Amen.

## JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 30.

Jesus visited Zaccheus the publican, who became a true convert; and, as he approached to Jerusalem, he delivered the parable of the ten pounds.

THE city of Jericho had been formerly rendered famous by the remarkable triumph which Joshua there obtained. In this same spot the Lord Jesus triumphed by his grace, and erected a trophy in proof of his victory over Satan. He had already manifested his high character, in the confines of the town, by giving sight to the blind: but a more illustrious instance of his power and mercy is now to be exhibited, in the conversion of a notorious sinner. Let us "praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men." How many witnesses declare that He is "mighty to save!" Every fresh example encourages our application to him and dependence upon him. May his Spirit work effectually in us, that, while we contemplate his free and extensive kindness to others, we also may partake of his great salvation !

As Jesus passed through Jericho, he was attended by an immense concourse of people. Perhaps, also, the miracle which he wrought there added to his train. One of this numerous company is selected for our peculiar notice; and his case is considered by the sacred historian as so interesting, that it is introduced with a mark of admiration\*. "Behold, there was a man named Zaccheus, which was the chief

among the publicans, and he was rich." By his rank in life, as principal of the tax-gatherers, having many collectors under him, he possessed no small influence, and had raised an ample fortune. A situation this, most unfavourable to religion! Power and wealth are great hinderances in the way of salvation: those who are most exalted in the world seem the furthest removed from the very means of conversion. They are, as it were, fenced round with strong barriers, which prevent an access to their hearts. When such persons, therefore, become "obedient to the faith," the hand of the Lord is illustriously displayed in the change. His grace is effectual to surmount all difficulties; when he is pleased to work, none shall let it \*: " even the rich among the people shall entreat in his favour t."

But Zaccheus had, also, been a man of base character and iniquitous conduct, covetous, unjust, and oppressive. And some may be ready to ask, Can such an one obtain mercy? Or is it probable that Jesus should ever look with a favourable regard upon him? Yes: the very man before us is singled out as a monument of his mercy, in order to show that he can pardon, sanctify, and save, the chief of sinners.

Zaccheus, it should seem, sought not for any acquaintance with Jesus, but, probably, was induced by mere curiosity to mix with the multitude, that he might gain a sight of the remarkable Person of whom he had heard so much. But not being able to gratify his wishes, on account of the crowd and his own diminutive size, he mounted up into a tree by the side of the road, that he might have a distinct view. Jesus observed him, and called to him by name. desiring him to come down, and expressing an in-tention of being his guest. Thus our Lord was the first to propose the visit; and, by this unsolicited

<sup>\* 1</sup>sa, xliii, 13. + Psal, xlv. 12.

favour, he "prevented him with the blessings of

We rejoice when the careless and profane are brought by any motive to attend where Jesus vouchsafes his presence. Very frequently they obtain those benefits which they never coveted or sought. Various inducements may lead them to the place, where the divine ordinances are administered, and the truth of the Gospel is faithfully declared; such as general custom, habits of education, the solicitations of others, some strange reports about the preacher or the doctrine, and an inquisitive desire to know what can attract so large a concourse of people. Now, however weak or wrong these reasons may be, we would still encourage them to come and show themselves, where the Saviour passeth by. Perhaps he may unexpectedly look upon them, and reveal himself to them, as he did to Zaccheus. Thus, in many cases, repentance, faith, and love, have been suddenly produced under those means which were first resorted to through an idle curiosity. They who meant to be mere spectators, or captious critics, have found themselves deeply interested: their hearts have been instantly impressed and changed, so that they have departed with sentiments and dispositions very different from those which they brought with them. Jesus beholds them with compassion, and, even before they offer up a prayer to him, speaks effectually to their consciences, and attaches them inseparably to himself. In the conversion of every sinner the unmerited grace of God is gloriously displayed: but in these instances more especially it appears at once that "boasting is excluded:" and that their love to the Saviour is properly the fruit of his love to them; that "they have not chosen him, but he hath chosen them \*."

The call was no sooner given to Zaccheus than it

was cheerfully obeyed: and it is of importance to remark the astonishing alteration which he immediately discovered. The effect, however, must be ascribed, not only to the word of Christ, but to the divine Spirit, which rendered that word so powerful. eager haste the rich publican came down from the tree, where he had taken his place, and received his illustrious Guest with impressions of lively joy. could not but be surprised to hear a perfect stranger to him, as he might conceive, addressing him by name, and proposing to abide at his house: but it is evident that he instantly felt a conviction of the high dignity of the Personage before him, and considered the offer as an act of gracious condescension. heart, therefore, being first opened, he was glad to admit the divine Visitant within his doors, and thought

himself honoured by his presence.

Is this the reception which the Saviour meets with among ourselves? How few yield a ready obedience to his word! "He hath called, but we refused: He hath stretched out his hand, and no man regarded \*." Is there, even with you who profess an attention to his Gospel, any thing like that affectionate attachment to him which Zaccheus showed? Would you consent that he should abide with you; and would you rejoice to furnish an entertainment for him? He is, indeed, removed from the earth; but you have many of his representatives around you, and you are required to evince your love for him by your kindness to them. Do you, then, search out his poor members, that you may minister to their necessities? Do you embrace every opportunity of relieving them? And are you thankful for the exalted privilege? This fruit of divine grace we observe in Zaccheus. While he made a public confession of his former wickedness before Jesus and all the company, he wished to testify the sincerity of his repentance. He, whose grand

object had been to amass worldly treasures, was no sooner acquainted with the Saviour, than he expressed a willingness to give up a large share of his wealth for the support of the indigent. He declared his determination to consecrate his substance to the Lord, by devoting even the half of it to charitable purposes. The same extensive distribution, according to that exact division of our property, is not binding upon us. But we are strangers to the love of Christ, if we shut up our bowels of compassion from the afflicted, nay, if we do not "open our hand wide unto them," as God hath prospered us. Ah! how many warm advocates for the Gospel betray their insincerity by "having a heart exercised with covetous practices \*!"

But you are required to be just as well as liberal; for God says, "I hate robbery for burnt-offering †." If there be any dishonest gain in your possession, if you have enriched yourselves by fraud or extortion, it is surely known unto God, and an explicit confession should be made. Thus the publican acknowledged his baseness in oppressing the people by a violent and injurious execution of his office. But you must do more than merely declare your sorrow for the past. Nor is it enough for "him that stole to steal no more;" you must not retain in your hands what you have wrongfully taken from another. Suppose not that by giving a pittance of it to the poor your guilt will be expiated: for such charity is continued theft. It is not yours to bestow: it is another's property, and, if you can find the owner, you must restore it.

This strong and necessary evidence of sincere contrition appeared in Zaccheus. "I am ready," said ke, "not only to relinquish the full amount of what I have gained from any person by false charges, but to return him four times as much ‡." In many cases

<sup>\* 2</sup> Pet. ii. 14. + Isa. lxi. 8. # See Lev. vi. 1-5.

it may be difficult to settle what particular compensation is proper: and we fear that few are troubled with any scruples upon the subject. But let every reader make a faithful appeal to his conscience, and attend to its report. Have all your past transactions been conducted according to the rules of truth and equity? Have you no painful remembrance of any fraud or extortion which you have practised? And are you not concerned to make all possible reparation for whatever injuries you have done? If you refuse this as a degree of preciseness which is needless or absurd, talk not of your Christianity; your hypocrisy is most glaring. "Go your way; first be reconciled to your brother," by offering restitution and satisfaction, according to your ability, before you pretend to devotion.

Jesus himself, who knew "what was in man," bore an unquestionable testimony in favour of Zaccheus, declaring that he had that day obtained salvation, and proved himself a real child of Abraham. This could not be on account of his descent merely, but because he had the faith of Abraham, and experienced the renovation of the Holy Ghost. Probably he arose in the morning ignorant, careless, and profane; but before night how great a change took place! he received a new heart, the forgiveness of his sins, and the assurance of divine favour. How extensive, and how powerful, is the grace of God! Has it produced such effects as these in us? It is of little consequence whether the transformation be sudden; but is it certain? Has the Saviour visited us with the blessings of redemption? To "as many as receive him he gives power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name \*." "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise †."

Who shall object to this? The very mercy of God,

<sup>+</sup> Gal. iii. 29. \* John i. 12.

which should draw forth praises from every tongue, frequently excites disgust. Some appear unwilling that atrocious offenders should be saved at all, or, at least, that pardon and eternal life should be offered to them on the same terms as to themselves. were those who cavilled at the conduct of Jesus for the kind notice which he took of Zaccheus, whose character was generally accounted infamous. he vindicated himself on this ground, that the very end for which he came into the world was " to seek and to save that which was lost;" and therefore he was acting agreeably to his grand design, in using means to rescue them from destruction, whose case seemed of all others the most desperate. Justly may we rejoice in this representation. We have no right to despise any persons, as if we might claim a preference; for the whole human race, having departed from God, are equally involved in ruin, and unable to extricate themselves. But Jesus appears for our help, and accomplishes deliverance for us: nor is any sinner sunk so low as to be beyond the reach of his mercy. He proposes salvation to us, and earnestly solicits our acceptance. Various methods he adopts for the recovery of our souls: let us not resist him, but yield ourselves in cheerful subjection to him, that his grace may reign in us unto eternal life.

After the conversion of Zaccheus, Jesus pursued his journey towards Jerusalem. Upon his nearer approach to the city, his followers expected that he would immediately assume the pomp and power of an earthly monarch, and establish an universal government\*. To correct these mistaken notions, he delivered a parable, in which he represented the nature of his dominion, and the opposition made to it, and admonished them that the proper business of his people is not to be solicitous for secular honours, but to employ themselves diligently in their ap-

<sup>\*</sup> Luke xis. 11-28.

pointed work till he shall come again, when he will receive his faithful servants to himself, and destroy his enemies.

A nobleman, or prince, departed to a distant country, to be invested with full powers for the possession of a kingdom, to which he was heir; and then he proposed to return in all the glory of majesty. But, in the mean time, many of those, who, from their peculiar relation to him, were more especially bound to submit to his authority, with great malignity declared their firm determination to resist and reject him in his real character. This is exactly the case with the Lord Jesus Christ. He is One of illustrious origin, of high descent, as "the Only-begotten of the Father," and "Heir of all things," concerning whom Jehovah himself hath sworn "That unto him every knee shall bow, every tongue confess \*." But his universal sovereignty was not to be established during his abode on earth, which was intended to be a state of profound humiliation. "He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." In order to enter upon his government, it was necessary for him to quit this world, and ascend to his Father: and then the sceptre was delivered into his hands. At the appointed season he will return with all the ensigns of royalty, and with irresistible power. He will come in his glory; and that shall be the day of his triumph.

For the present his dominion is not generally acknowledged. The Jews especially, who were his own people more than others, and ought to have submitted to him with joy, have shown a most malignant opposition to him, and solemnly renounced him as their ruler. But, without further notice of them, the question for ourselves is, Do we reverence the Saviour as we ought in his regal office? The kingdom is His: Do we rejoice in it? Do we cor-

<sup>\*</sup> Isa, xlv. 23. Phil. ii. 10, 11.

dially consent that "this Man shall reign over us?" Are we looking for his future advent? What reception may we expect from him when he appears? Or, what should be our deportment till he return?

The prince here described left his ten servants behind him, with the care of a certain portion of money. Ten pounds were committed to their management, of which they were charged to make a diligent use during his absence. Under these circumstances the disciples of Jesus are placed. They profess subjection to him, and they should act at his command. Their very name, as they are "servants," implies their obligations to work, agreeably to his directions. They are intrusted with various advantages, one in one way, and another in another; and these they are required to improve, as men in trade, that they may turn them to the most profitable account. It is intended, indeed, that they, who are faithful to their Master, shall be sharers with him in the future glory of his kingdom: vet for the present they are appointed, not to any high honours or distinctions in the world, as some persons then vainly dreamed, but to a post of labour and difficulty; and their most vigorous efforts are necessary in the business assigned them.

The prince returned in full possession of the sovereignty which he had expected, and strictly examined his servants what benefit had accrued from their use of the money committed to them. Two of the number, by their fidelity and diligence in commerce, had made considerable improvement of their stock, though one of them was far inferior to the other. Both came and acknowledged their obligations to their lord, as if they had said, "We are indebted to thee for the advantages bestowed upon us; and the increase we have gained must be ascribed to thy favour, which enabled us to maintain our occupation, rather than to our own wisdom and good management." The conduct of both was approved, and publicly commended; and they were then appointed to a state of exaltation and dignity, proportioned to their respective exertions and usefulness in

the service of their master.

The day of reckoning is at hand, and it will soon appear what good we have done in our place, what profitable purposes have been promoted by our various opportunities. The disciples of Jesus, under the influence of his grace, are all active; and, by a faithful attention to their Lord's concerns, they render themselves a blessing in their generation, though in different ways, and in different degrees. "When he shall appear, they shall have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming." The most eminent of them will not then presume to boast of their own works, or their progress in holiness; but they will all praise him for the efficacy of his Spirit in them, and for the advancement of his own glory, by their weak and unworthy efforts. They will say, therefore, "All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee \*." But their labours shall receive a distinguished recompense: Jesus will profess himself well pleased in them, and admit them to a participation of his own honour and felicity, according to the various measures of their zeal and 'fidelity in his cause. O, be animated, you that serve him, while you "have respect unto the recompense of the reward!" Be roused from your sloth; for are not your languid exertions very unsuitable to such high expectations? Are you trading with your pound to any beneficial purpose? What is the increase which you have gained? O, "be not wearied nor faint in your minds;" but "hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ †!"

A third character, very different from the two pre-

<sup>\* 1</sup> Chron. xxix. 14. + Heb. xii. 3. 1 Pet i. 13.

ceding, is here also exhibited. He had made no use at all of the advantages intrusted to him; for he had not traded with his pound. He had not, indeed, squandered it away in dissipation, but, neglecting to improve it, "laid it up in a napkin." He is represented as pleading in his own excuse, with great insolence, that his lord was a severe and rigid master, who exacted such services as he had no right to, and for which he would not grant sufficient strength and ability.

This is the case with many who are admired in the world. They are satisfied with doing no harm, and see not their obligations to be active and useful in their Christian calling. They live, therefore, a quiet indolent life, and can scarcely be said to have a place in existence. If we inquire of them why they decline the work of the Lord, they are always ready to complain of insurmountable difficulties, and express hard thoughts of God, as requiring more than is reasonable, and more than they can possibly perform. But, without examining the truth or justice of these pleas, we observe that their very excuses will turn to their own confusion.

The master convicted this indolent man of the most palpable inconsistency, and argued, that, even on his own principles, he ought to have made some use of his money. He declared, "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant." Thus it will appear at the last that sinners are not influenced by their own foolish pretences, that their negligence is unpardonable in every view, and that what they urge in their defence will furnish sufficient ground for their condemnation, as evincing their rooted enmity against God.

The pound was taken from him, who was too slothful to improve it, and given as an additional recompense to the person who had been most assiduous. And this, we are assured, is agreeable to the general dispensations of God. He will put the most honourable distinction on them who discover the greatest fidelity and diligence; but those, who through disaffection refuse to exert themselves for him, will be deprived of all their advantages, and never allowed another trial. May we adore his justice, and tremble for ourselves!

The prince, who was heir to the kingdom, was rejected, as we have seen, by his own citizens, who were under peculiar obligations to receive and welcome him. But, when he had assumed his full power, he proceeded to punish their insolence; and, while he vindicated his authority, he destroyed with terrible vengeance those enemies of his government. Thus Jesus predicted, that, though his own nation would openly avow a determined opposition to him, he should come again to assert his supreme dominion, and give them up to the most severe calamities, and to everlasting perdition, for their rebellion against him. This has been in part fulfilled already. The Jews, in their national capacity, renounced the Saviour with the utmost malignity, and resisted every effort to establish his kingdom amongst them. But they have felt the weight of his arm. To avenge the insults put upon him, their holy city was ransacked, their temple demolished, their land desolated, their ecclesiastical and civil polity entirely subverted, and a tremendous slaughter, unparalleled in history. nearly completed the ruin of the people.

This alone is enough to strike us with horror; but it is not all. Another and a far more terrible display of his justice, in the punishment of his enemies, remains for his future advent. And in that, not the unbelieving Jews alone, but all in every age and nation who reject the Saviour, will be deeply concerned. Whoever shall be found opposers of his grace, unwilling to bow to his sceptre, shall be brought forth for public execution, a spectacle to the whole

universe, and shall feel the fierceness of his anger, in torment inexpressible, for ever and ever. Let every soul, then, yield an immediate and unreserved subjection to this "King of Zion." Constrained by his mercies, as well as awed by his terrors, let us surrender up ourselves to him, that he may reign over us, and prepare us to reign with him in his glory Amen.

## JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 31.

Jesus raised Lazarus from the grave—was anointed with costly perfume—rode in triumph to Jerusalem—wept over it—purged the temple.

A more particular account is given us of the circumstances attending and immediately preceding the death of Jesus than of any part of his life. We are approaching to that important period; and, as we accompany him through the awful scene, we shall observe by what steps the surprising event was accomplished. The subject is calculated, not to gratify a vain curiosity, but to impress our minds with seriousness and solemnity.

We have already contemplated our Lord setting out on his last journey to Jerusalem; previous to which, however, an interesting occurrence had called him into the neighbourhood of that city, though he was soon driven back again by the malicious rage of his enemies, and obliged to seek a distant retreat till his appointed hour arrived. That occurrence we shall introduce in this place, as it is so closely con-

nected with the sequel\*.

At Bethany, as we have seen, about two miles from Jerusalem, dwelt a pious and beloved family, who were frequently favoured with his company. Lazarus, the head of the family, was seized with a violent disorder, of which his two affectionate sisters, Mary and Martha, sent information to Jesus, while he remained beyond Jordan. Upon receiving this

<sup>\*</sup> John xi. 1, &c.

account, Jesus observed that the sickness would not terminate in Lazarus's final departure from life, but was intended to display the character, and exalt the glory, of the Son of God. He meant, therefore, to grant relief; and yet he judged it expedient to try the faith and patience of those, for whom he had the strongest regard, by deferring his aid, and suffering their distress to increase. After two days, and not sooner, he proposed to return into Judea; but the disciples, aware of the malicious designs of his enemies, objected to the plan. He declared, however, that, as the day is the proper time for travellers to prosecute their journey, so he should spend the short residue of his life in a diligent attention to the great business for which he came into the world.

He then intimated to them the situation of Lazarus, and his own intentions respecting him. But his words were not understood till he affirmed more explicitly that Lazarus was dead, and that he considered it as a happy circumstance that he himself was not with him to prevent the change, because their faith would receive an additional confirmation from the miracle of which they were going to be witnesses. Still they thought it extremely dangerous to venture so near to Jerusalem; but Thomas advised that they should cheerfully accompany their dear Master, though the consequence might be fatal to them all.

The affecting narrative will teach even you, whom Jesus loves, not to be surprised if sickness or sore distress come upon you. In your deepest afflictions, you ought not to conclude that he has acted unkindly, or that he will not deliver you. Perhaps you are unwilling to wait for his interposition; and for that very reason it may be delayed till your case may seem desperate. But in the end you shall perceive stronger proofs of his power and grace, and find his mercy the more precious. You shall learn, also, from your Saviour, to improve the hours of the day, and "to walk,"

while you "see the light of this world;" remembering that all your opportunities of usefulness will be closed when the night of death arrives. You should be roused to diligence and vigour; nor should the prospect of dangers intimidate you. Desert not your standard; but determine, like Thomas, to adhere steadfastly to Jesus, and to "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth," even to the severest tortures,

or to martyrdom itself.

When they came to Bethany, Lazarus had been four days in his grave; and many friends from Jerusalem were assembled at the house, endeavouring to comfort the mourning sisters for the loss of their brother. Upon an intimation of the approach of Jesus, Martha, with all that eagerness which marked her natural temper, ran to meet him; and, though she seemed to upbraid him for not preventing their distress, she expressed a hope that at his prayer some deliverance might yet be obtained. Her language evinced her faith; but at the same time it betrayed much weakness. Jesus in reply, without reproving her for what was wrong or defective in her principles, declared that Lazarus should rise again; but a resurrection from the dead, merely at the final consummation, was not the relief she wished. He then directed her attention to himself, "as the resurrection and the life," that she might have clearer conceptions of his exalted character, and be so strengthened in her dependence upon him as to expect the miraculous operation, which he meant to perform. His words were most sublime, and replete with instruction of peculiar importance. He assured her, that as the Author, Restorer, and Preserver of life, he has all power in himself to quicken whom he will, and that every believer, by virtue of an union with him, is brought into a state of glorious existence, which death cannot destroy or impair. Upon his inquiring whether she yielded a cordial assent to this interesting truth, she creectly acquiesced, professing her firm persuasion, hat he was indeed the promised Saviour, the Son of God.

Have we, likewise, so regarded Jesus, as he is here epresented? Behold what honour is due to his name! Is he not to be revered and worshipped as 'the mighty God," since he vindicates to himself the prerogative of reviving those over whom death has prevailed, and of imparting and supporting a principle of endless life, according to his own sovereign pleasure? Shall we not, then, stand in awe, and confess and adore the Divinity in this exalted Personage? What answer shall we return to the question, "Believest thou this?" It is indispensably necessary for every one to credit his declaration, and rely upon him for the blessing which he proposes to bestow. The promise of salvation, including both spiritual and eternal life, is annexed to faith. If we possess an unreserved dependence upon him, how great is our felicity! We shall feel the quickening energy of his Spirit giving vigour to our souls, and maintaining that vigour against all opposition. Nor shall any thing be able to destroy our union with him. Our present mode of existence may cease, and our bodies be consigned to the grave; but we shall even then enjoy a state of happiness and glory with him; and at the last day "He will swallow up death in victory," "ransom us from the power of the grave," and give us our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in his own everlasting kingdom. What an unfailing source of consolation is here! "Sorrow not," then, believers, "as others which have no hope."

Mary, who seems to have been almost overwhelmed with grief, remained in the house for some time; but at length, being called by her sister, she also ran with eager haste to meet Jesus. The interview then became extremely affecting. The distress of these

affectionate relations and their weeping associates excited the tenderest emotions in the Saviour; and thus, while he sympathised with the afflicted, he proved himself a partaker of human nature. Many considerations, probably, upon this mournful occasion, oppressed his mind, and constrained him, as he indulged his compassionate feelings, to burst into tears. He accompanied them to the sepulchre, and directed the stone to be removed. Martha objected that the body was become offensive, evidently implying that deliverance could not then be effected: but Jesus immediately reproved her for her unbelief. Standing by the tomb, with uplifted eyes to heaven, he gave thanks to his Father for granting his requests, and for the present opportunity of displaying his glory; and with a divine majesty, as the supreme Almighty Lord, "to whom belong the issues from death," he commanded the grave to release its prisoner. At this powerful word Lazarus came forth with life, and health, and vigour.

O, what surprise, and joy, and gratitude, must have overwhelmed the dear friends, upon the miraculous restoration of him whom they so tenderly loved, and had considered as irrecoverably removed from their society! Doubtless they looked up with admiration, love, and praise, to the great Deliverer. But how much more illustrious the triumph when ALL the saints of God shall be raised incorruptible, each of them clothed with a splendour resembling the sun in the firmament! Then also the eyes of the whole redeemed company shall be fixed on the Saviour with unutterable ecstacy, and the glory shall be ascribed to him, who is "the resurrection and the

life."

Will not this be allowed as an unquestionable evidence of our Lord's divine character? Who can withstand the testimony of one that arose from the dead? Will not all be constrained to yield unfeigned

reverence and submission to the Son of God? Many of those who were present felt a forcible conviction from the view of the miracle, and immediately believed on him. But, oh! the blindness and obduracy of the human heart! External proofs are not sufficient to produce the efficacious principle of faith; the mighty power of God is requisite to implant the proper disposition of mind. Some, who were witnesses of the wondrous fact, carried information of it to his avowed adversaries, and, as it should seem, with the malevolent intention of exciting opposition against him. At their report the grand council of the sanhedrim was assembled, to consult upon the steps necessary to be taken for obviating his increasing popularity. The result of their deliberation was, to endeavour by some method or other to destroy him: and in this they were directed by the advice of Caiaphas, the high-priest, who spake by a divine impulse what he did not understand, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. But vain were all their designs of violence till his hour came. He retired to Ephraim, a distant city, not far from the river Jordan, where he lay concealed till within a few days of his last passover, when he surrendered himself to their malice.

Let us meditate on the unbelief and obstinacy of the Jews, not that we may frame any bitter invectives against them, but that we may fear for ourselves. Their case furnishes the most solemn admonition. Let us beware of resisting the evidences which are set before us, lest we be given up to a similar obduracy. Let us pray that God would put forth his power, in subduing our natural depravity; for it requires the same almighty energy, which raised Lazarus from the grave, to bring us into a state of unfeigned subjection to the Saviour. Thus may we be constrained to trust, and love, and serve him, and to glory in him as the "the Author of cternal salvation!"

Jesus, who withdrew from persecution, has taught us to be prudent in consulting our safety, when no express duty makes it proper to hazard it. But his example likewise instructs us to face the most formidable dangers with firmness and intrepidity, in obedience to the will of God. At the appointed season, he kept not back from the murderous city, where his enemies thirsted for his blood; though he had all his sufferings full in his view, he advanced to meet them

with cheerfulness and courage. Six days before the passover he returned to Bethany, whence he had been driven by the violence of the Jews\*. In that town an entertainment was provided for him in the house of Simon, who, from his surname, had probably once been a leper. Lazarus, also, whom he had raised from the grave, was one of the guests upon that occasion; and Martha discovered her attachment by waiting upon him. Mary, the other sister of Lazarus, that she might testify her affectionate regard and high veneration, procured a box of expensive ointment, composed of rich perfumes: part she poured upon his head, and with the remainder anointed his feet, wiping them at the same time with her flowing hair. The action was extraordinary, and so were the circumstances. We must ascribe it, doubtless, to the most excellent principles, which rendered it acceptable to Jesus. Such was her fervent love, that she spared no cost to give a striking proof it; such her deep humility, that she wished to perform the meanest as well as the kindest office for him.

But her conduct disgusted some, even of the disciples, who probably condemned it as wild and extravagant. Judas, in particular, objected to her from the basest motives; while he pretended, what he never felt, a tender concern for the poor, and argued that the price of the ointment had better have been

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xxvi 6-13. Mark xiv. 3-9. John xii. 1-11.

devoted to charitable uses; he meant to appropriate it to his own use. Jesus, however, who knew the purity of her intentions, and the strength of her regard for him, undertook her defence. He justified and commended the action, as being well suited to his dying situation, and, as it were, an embalming of his body, preparatory to his burial. He observed, that opportunities of relieving indigence continually occur, which should draw forth the benevolence of his people; but that, as he was soon to leave them, and few more occasions of ministering to him would be afforded, some extraordinary marks of respect might properly be paid him at that time. He declared also, to show his gracious acceptance of her love, that, wherever the Gospel should be published, her affection for him should be celebrated.

This little narrative will furnish an instructive lesson. Let us not precipitately or warmly censure those zealous exertions in the service of Christ which may appear to us needless or extravagant. While we condemn, Jesus may highly approve. The ardour of some persons, in certain uncommon cases, may carry them such lengths as would be extremely improper in the ordinary course of things. We may not clearly understand the circumstances or the motives of their conduct; and therefore let us leave them to him, who knows their hearts, and who will not only make all favourable allowances for the sincere, but applaud and reward whatever they have done from the pure, disinterested regard to him.

Perhaps you, who are forward to reproach others for their intemperate heat, may be much more displeasing to Christ by your coldness and hesitation, and fear of going too far in his cause. How rare is such love as that of Mary to her Lord and Saviour! Many will profess a strong attachment to him, who refuse to be at any expense in his service. We ask, then, if you can part with your money for his sake?

You cannot, indeed, yield an exact imitation of this pious woman, since the bodily presence of Jesus is removed from the earth. But his poor remain among us, and they are appointed his receivers: "whensoever ye will, ye may do them good." O, let us beware of a covetous parsimonious spirit, which would represent a liberal disposition as improper or wasteful. There are those, who will plead for charity, as Judas, till they are brought to the trial; and then it appears that they are more anxious to increase their own store than to relieve the indigent. Let us judge ourselves; why are we content with doing so little, or

why do we rate that little so highly?

When it was known at Jerusalem that Jesus was in the neighbourhood, a large concourse of people resorted from that city to Bethany, not merely for his sake, but that they might have a sight of Lazarus, who was so wonderful a monument of his power and The miracle which had been wrought had already attached the hearts of many to the Saviour, and excited the curiosity of more; but the chief priests, who were enraged on this very account, seriously meditated not only his destruction, but that also of him who had been recalled from the grave. How foolish as well as wicked the design! He, who had been once raised from the dead, might, with the same ease, have been instantly restored But those who resist the Lord's Anointed are chargeable with the grossest absurdity. Their wisest contrivances are "a vain thing;" and "the Lord shall have them in derision \*."

We do not wonder, that they, whose cases have illustriously displayed the mercy of the Redeemer, are persecuted, like Lazarus, with peculiar malignity. The enemies of Jesus, who really aim at Him, direct their envenomed shafts against them who are witnesses for his name. Believers, however, may pos-

<sup>\*</sup> Psalm ii. 1-4.

sess peace and confidence in the midst of opposition, since their Defender is invincible. He, who keepeth them, has numbered the very hairs of their head, and declares that "none shall pluck them out of his hand \*."

We have accompanied Jesus to the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, and now we contemplate his remarkable entrance into the city. Hitherto we have seen that he sought not any worldly honours, having studiously declined even the semblance of pomp and ostentation. But toward the close of his life we perceive a different scene. We behold the humble Nazarene attended by a singular procession, in which, while he permitted the people to do him homage, he designed to exhibit a representation of his regal character.

A. D. 31. On the day after his entertainment at Sunday before Bethany, he proceeded on his journey. On the day after his entertainment at the Passover. When he came to the mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples to an adjacent village, that they might bring thence an ass and her unbroken foal't. He directed them to the very place, and so minutely described the circumstances in which they should find the animals, as to show his exact knowledge of things distant, and seemingly accidental. The narrative also proves that he could influence the minds of men as he pleased; for the owners of the ass relinquished her without hesitation, upon being told that "the Lord had need of her." The young colt he condescended to make the bearer of his person, and rode in a sort of triumph to the city, with much meekness, and yet with an appearance of majesty 1.

\* John x. 28. † Matt. xxi. 1-16. Mark xi. 1-11. Luke

xix. 29, &c. John xii. 12-19.

‡ There was nothing ridiculous or mean in Christ's riding on an ass; for, not to mention that this animal in eastern countries is of a larger size and more graceful appearance than among us, some of the most eminent persons, patriarchs, judges, and kings, made use of asses; and, probably, with a reference to that primitive simplicity, he chose this method of going in solemn and triumphant proces-

Many persons conducted him from Bethany; and many more, having heard of his raising Lazarus from the grave, came from Jerusalem to meet him. The whole multitude, as if by a miraculous impulse, appeared to vie with each other in ascribing all possible honours to him. They spread their garments in the way, and, cutting down branches of trees, part of them they strewed upon the road, and with part they marched before him; these being usual expressions of joy upon the arrival of a potent monarch or victorious general. Under a full conviction that Jesus was the Messiah, and the expectation of his assuming the government, they began to praise God with a loud voice, and to shout with exultation, though they understood not the import of their own words, "Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is the King that cometh in the name of the Lord; peace in heaven, and glory in the highest!"

Do we ask the reason of all this? Among other causes to be assigned, it was the purpose of God to fulfil an ancient prophecy. Zechariah had expressly foretold\* that the Saviour, the King of Zion, would make such a public appearance as is here described. The most minute circumstances in this view, as completions of former and authentic predictions, are important; they furnish incontestable evidence for the truth of the Gospel. How manifold is the wisdom of God, who raised up holy men, and instructed them to declare, some hundred years before, many of the things which the Redeemer should both do and

sion to Jerusalem. Gen. xxii. 3. Exod. iv. 20. Judg. v. 10. x. 4. 2 Sam. xvi. 2. xix. 26. He meant to assert his regal character, according to the ancient style and custom of their princes, and to declare his regard to the law, by discountenancing that use of horses, which had been introduced through a fondness for splendour, and which God had expressly forbidden, Deut. xvii. 16. See Bishop Chandler's Defence of Christianity, and Bishop Sherlock's Dissertation on Christ's entrance into Jerusalem.

say! No event can take place which he did not foresee, and which, in this sense, did not form a part

of his original plan.

Do we join in these acclamations, and welcome the King of Israel with our Hosannas? Do we, with ardent and devout affections, exult in the blessings of his government, which brings peace to man and glory to God? And do we most earnestly pray for an extensive enlargement of his dominion, even to the ends of the earth? Such zeal as this may be termed madness and enthusiasm; and accordingly there are few who dare to express any real fervour in the cause of Christ, lest they should expose themselves to scorn and derision. But the day of his complete triumph is coming, of which his procession to Jerusalem was a faint emblem. He shall soon be revealed in all the splendour of his divine majesty; and the honours of his kingdom shall be universally acknowledged. Saints and Angels shall join, with inexpressible love and transport, in everlasting acclamations to the Son of David. Would you bear a part in the joyful exultations of that day, and celebrate the high praises of your Redeemer? You must begin your song on earth, confess his glory, and pray that the purposes of his spiritual government may be fully effected within yourselves.

This profound veneration paid to Jesus, these rapturous shouts of applause, were offensive to the Pharisees. They cried out in a rage, "We prevail nothing; Behold, the world is gone after him." They called upon him to reprehend his disciples for their officious and intemperate zeal. But he defended their conduct, maintaining that the honour due to his exalted character must be proclaimed, even though a miracle should be requisite to accomplish that end, and that, if they were to be silenced, the very stones would rise up as witnesses for him. And does not the temper of the ancient Pharisees prevail in modern

times? Are there not many, who would damp the fervour, and resist the vigorous efforts, of those lively Christians, who labour to advance the kingdom of Christ? He, however, will secure his own glory; for, though we and thousands more refuse to praise him, he will raise up others to do it, even such, perhaps, as may be vile and contemptible in our eyes. Let the followers of Jesus, then, indulge a holy transport, while they unite in their acclamations to him. "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King."

But the triumph was soon interrupted, and the Redeemer himself bathed in tears. How affecting the sight! When he approached the city, so as to take in a full view of its extent and magnificence, he felt the tenderest compassion for its unbelieving and obdurate inhabitants. Foreseeing the complicated miseries and entire desolation which awaited them, so far from exulting in their confusion and destruction, he mourned, he lamented, for them. He cried out, in the bitterness of his soul, "Oh, that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." He then added a clear and circumstantial prediction of the siege and total overthrow of that infatuated place, assigning as the reason of all its calamities the indifference and neglect with which his gracious offers had been treated.

The case of Jerusalem speaks aloud to us, and calls us to examine, whether we know, or seriously attend to, "the things which belong unto our peace." It warns us not to reject or make light of the Gospel, which is calculated to secure to us both present and everlasting happiness. Soon may "the glad tidings" be withdrawn; and He, who now addresses us in terms of mercy, may appear against us as our adversary, in the thunders of his wrath. This, then, is "the time of our visitation;" for the Saviour himself waits upon us in the ministry of his word. Are we aware of

the important consequences of the present moment? If salvation be despised, it will be the ground of our heaviest condemnation; and we ourselves may perish. with a more terrible destruction than even the sinners of Jerusalem.

The entrance of Jesus with so singular a procession threw the whole city into commotion, and excited a general inquiry about this extraordinary Personage. Very soon he displayed the glory of his character by different proofs. He went immediately to the temple, and began, as with divine authority, to correct the abuses and punish the profanations which prevailed there. Now again, as he had done before, he drove out the traders with indignation, and vindicated the honour of that holy place, which God had chosen to himself for "the house of prayer." By fresh miracles, also, in healing the blind and the lame, he gave the strongest evidence that he had a full right to that power which he exercised.

Were not all, then, at length convinced, and persuaded to receive him? The very children took up the song, while they cried, as if by a supernatural impulse, "Hosanna to the Son of David:" and thus their infant tongues, in celebrating the praises of the Redeemer, were witnesses against the rulers of the people. The chief priests, who ought to have been his most zealous advocates, expressed violent displeasure at these proceedings. But Jesus vindicated the acclamations of the children, and showed, from the Scriptures, that it was God's determination to get himself glory, as he did in that instance, "out of the mouth of babes and sucklings\*." How should this encourage those of youngest years to offer their adorations to Jesus! It cannot be too soon for them to learn Hosannas to his name. He will listen to them with peculiar delight, and consider himself honoured by their weak attempts. Perhaps, too, he may make

<sup>\*</sup> Psal, viii, 2.

use of them to confound the wisest and strongest of his enemies.

The common people, likewise, were much affected by the doctrines of Jesus. While he taught them daily in the temple, they crowded to hear him, and appeared to hang upon his words. In general, the lower orders have been found to yield a serious and eager attention to the Gospel; while the rich too frequently, possessing more pride and prejudice, turn away their ears in disdain. The Jewish rulers continued to seek the destruction of Jesus: but their malice was restrained a few days longer. As he had so many adherents among the poor, they were afraid of proceeding to any act of violence against him: nor could their efforts have at last succeeded, except he had surrendered himself into their hands. mournful history exhibits the strongest proofs of the wickedness of man; but it affords us, also, a pleasing representation of the grace of the Saviour, waiting to show mercy to his most virulent opposers. we be constrained, by a sense of his great love, to drop all our perverse objections to him, and yield ourselves unfeignedly to his disposal! Thus may we be redeemed to God, and established "unblamable in holiness" through Jesus Christ! Amen.

## JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 32.

Jesus instructed certain inquiring Greeks-warned the unbelieving Jews—cursed a barren fig-tree—con-founded those who questioned his authority—admonished them by the parable of the two sons, and by that of the vineyard, let out to unful hful husbandmen.

A GENERAL commotion was excited in Jerusalem by our Lord's singular entrance into it, by the loud Hosannas sung before him, and by the miracles which he there publicly performed. Many persons of different dispositions came about him; some sincere inquirers sought his instruction; but a more numerous company opposed him with extreme malignity. He varied the manner of his address, according to the cases and characters of the people; and yet in every instance he preserved the same "meekness of wisdom." May his followers, and especially his ministers, learn from him to be "gentle unto all men," as well as to be ready always to declare "the hope that is in them!"

As the celebration of the passover approached, a large concourse of those, who professed to worship the God of Israel, was then assembled at Jerusalem from all parts of Judea. Among the rest were certain pious Greeks, probably of Gentile extraction, who desired to be introduced to Jesus \*. They applied to Philip for this purpose, and he, together with Andrew, whom he consulted on the occasion, informed Jesus of their wishes. They were immediately conducted into his presence, and the Saviour addressed them, with great solemnity, to the following effect :-

"The Son of man, whom you now behold in circumstances of meanness, is about to enter on a state of the highest exaltation. But be not staggered, while you observe that my glory is preceded by extreme sufferings: for these are necessary to accomplish the object which I have in view, the salvation of precious souls. As the wheat springs up from the grain, which at first seems to perish in the earth, and which, except it putrefy, will produce no increase; so a numerous company shall be redeemed to God in consequence of my death, and not one of the human race can be saved without it. He also, that professes an attachment to my cause, must be willing to make the most painful sacrifices. A solicitous regard to your temporal interests will endanger your eternal welfare; but, while you can cheerfully give up life itself for my sake, you adopt the most effectual method to secure your own happiness for ever. If, therefore, you would acknowledge me as your Lord and Master, you must be obedient to my command, and follow, without hesitation, wherever I shall lead, even to the severest calamities; and then you shall be with me, to behold my glory, and sit down with me in my kingdom. My Father himself will declare his approbation of your conduct, and confer distinguished honour upon you.".

It is pleasing to observe that there are any humble inquirers after Jesus. His faithful ministers will rejoice to direct you, and encourage your application to him. They will, as it were, take you by the hand, and conduct you to the knowledge of him, whose acquaintance you seek: nay he himself waits to receive you. But, while you come to him, attend to his solemn declarations. As he "hath suffered for us in the flesh," you must "arm yourselves with the same mind ," and endure the cross. Let it suffice you, that, "if you suffer, you shall also reign with him †." Is this

<sup>\* 1</sup> Pet. iv. 1. + 2 Tim. ii. 12.

what you object to? Do you determine to renounce the service of Christ, because it will subject you to difficulties; and resolve to gratify your own corrupt nature, because it promises you much present enjoyment? Ah! how unwise a choice, how unfair an estimate, do you make! For Jesus holds out a crown of glory to his despised and oppressed followers; but your carnal pleasures are momentary, and, if continued in, will

be succeeded by endless torment and despair.

Our Lord, having adverted to his approaching sufferings, was deeply affected with the prospect; and, as if the terrors of death had fallen upon him, he cried out, "Now is my soul troubled." He seemed, for a moment, confounded in the view, and ready to petition that he might be rescued from the cross. But, whatever the weakness of human nature might suggest, he resolved not to shrink from that which was the grand object of his incarnation; and therefore he prayed only, "Father, glorify thy name." Immediately a voice from heaven declared that the divine glory had already been secured, and would yet be more signally displayed by his ministry. While the astonished multitude wondered at the sound, many of them not hearing the words distinctly, Jesus remarked that this testimony was given not for his sake, as he could want no further assurances of his Father's love, but for the confirmation of their faith.

He then exulted in the confident expectation of the blessed consequences which would result from his death. He affirmed the moment to be at hand, when by his interposition the world should be delivered from the usurped dominion of the devil, and sinners every where, of all ranks and characters, should be attracted by the view of his cross to make application to him, and enlist themselves as faithful soldiers under

his banner.

This affords us an endcaring representation of the Saviour. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,

yet he opened not his mouth" in peevish complaints' to God, or bitter invectives against man. Though he felt unutterable anguish, he expressed not the least impatience: his only prayer was, that the honour of the divine name might be exalted, whatever he might endure. Here, then, is our pattern: we should resign ourselves to the disposal of God with like meekness and unreserved submission, and be more solicitous for his glory than our own personal ease and security. Alas! how little have we "learned Christ!" This is fully evinced by our fretfulness, discontent, and selfishness, by our eager desire that our trials may be removed, rather than the interest of religion promoted. Have we considered that it is one grand design of the death of Christ to deliver us from all carnal affections, and from the power of darkness? Is Satan indeed cast out from the possession of our hearts? Have we by faith beheld the Son of man "lifted up from the earth," and felt the constraining influence of his cross? Are we, then, "drawn unto him," so as to acknowledge our subjection, and vow unfeigned allegiance?

Our Lord's intimation of his approaching dissolution was cavilled at by some of the people, as inconsistent with the scriptural declarations of the perpetuity of Messiah's office. But he, knowing their captious disposition, exhorted them not to trifle away their present opportunities of instruction. He warned them that the light which then shone upon them, and which was sufficient to conduct them to eternal life, would soon be removed if they refused to follow its guidance, and they would be left in a state of deplorable ignorance and sin. How solemn the admonition, and how applicable to many in modern times! Are there not those, to whom the word of salvation is sent, who show a fondness for perverse disputation, rather than an humble desire of receiving spiritual advantage? We entreat them, therefore, to

consider the day of their visitation. Much of it is already gone: and has the great business of life ever yet been seriously attempted? Why need we answer this or the other question which you propose, if you are not earnestly solicitous to save your immortal souls? O, take heed, lest, while you trifle, "dark-

ness come upon you!"

We are not informed with what effect Jesus delivered his instructions to the inquiring Greeks; but a tremendous account is given us of many of the Jews who were present on this occasion. When they began to cavil, he departed, and withdrew from them the light which they despised. They believed not on him, but obstinately resisted all that strength of evidence which he had set before them in a long train of unquestionable miracles. The Evangelist observes that the lamentation of Isaiah, complaining of the general rejection of the Saviour \*, might properly be used with peculiar reference to them; and that his prophecy of the fatal judicial blindness and obduracy of the Jewish nation was accomplished at that very time +. He concluded, therefore, that their case was desperate, and that all means employed for their conversion would be ineffectual.

O, let us fear, lest we also come under the same condemnation, by an abuse of our present privileges! When sinners obstinately persist in stopping their ears against the calls of God, he determines that they shall not hear. And is not this a righteous dispensation, though the consequences be most tremendous? Who shall object? We are aware that this matter is perversely misrepresented, as if men were constrained to sin by a positive evil influence from God himself; or as if "they could not believe," though they most eagerly desired and endeavoured to do it. This is far from the case. They are left to their own choice; and God's final desertion of them is only the just

<sup>\*</sup>Isa. liii. 1. + vi. 9, 10.

punishment of their obstinate opposition. But, when he withdraws, we know that the most confirmed unbelief will ensue. We pray, therefore, "O Lord,

take not thy Holy Spirit from us \*!"

Many of the Jewish rulers felt a strong conviction in their minds that Jesus was the Messiah; but they dared not avow that conviction, because a public confession of him would have brought upon them severe reproach and persecution, and they were more solicitous to preserve their reputation with men than obtain the favour of God. How wretched the case! And yet many may read in them what they themselves are. Such are those who have not courage to meet the scorn and displeasure of the world in defence of that system of doctrine and practice which they are persuaded is most agreeable to the sacred Scriptures. The approbation of God is made light of, and his anger provoked, by such a conduct. Surely we give too much consequence to our fellowcreatures, in courting their notice and dreading their anger, with the sacrifice of conscience. What will they be able to do for us in the hour of death, or in the day of judgment?

Jesus departed from them, but he took another opportunity of delivering a solemn admonition. He asserted his divine mission, and his union with the Father. He declared himself the grand Luminary of mankind, who will communicate light to all sincere inquirers, and guide their feet into the way of peace. Yet, though the intent of his appearance on the earth was to confer salvation rather than pronounce judgment, he observes that unbelievers shall not escape, but shall be condemned in the last day by that word which they now contemptuously reject. How righteous the sentence, since they despise and oppose the will of God, so clearly manifested to them by his Son!

And as Jesus acted, so must his ministers. They

too must warn sinners of their danger. Will you, then, receive the record which he hath given? He demands your attention, not only as the messenger, but as the representative, and the very image of the invisible God. Can you disprove the credentials which he has exhibited? Or why should you resist him, who comes to rescue our fallen race from perishing, and who brings light, life, and peace, to all that believe? Do you not fear the awful doom which awaits his enemies? The Lord God will vindicate the honour of his Gospel; and, at the final consummation, you must account to him for your present neglect and contempt of it. Ah! how many will wish that they had lived and died in Pagan darkness, since the word of salvation, which is sent unto them, will witness against them, and, as it aggravates

their guilt, increase their misery for ever!

Monday in It should seem that Jesus was obliged Passion week. to hide himself from the malicious attempts of his opponents, and that each evening he retired from Jerusalem to Bethany for his own comfort as well as safety \*. Very early in the morning, probably on the second day of the week, he returned with ardent zeal to the city, from which he had fled the night before. Having set out without taking any food, he felt the call of hunger by the way, and thus proved that he really partook of our infirmities. A fig-tree being seen at a distance, he went to it, that he might refresh himself with the fruit, which might then be expected to be on the tree, as the time of gathering the figs was not arrived. But, upon his approach, finding it barren, though its leaves afforded a fair appearance, he pronounced a curse upon it, that it never should be able to produce any increase in succeeding seasons. The effect of the imprecation was immediate: "the fig-tree withered away." We are not to ascribe our Lord's conduct upon this occasion to weakness or peevishness of spirit, such as

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xxi. 17-19. Mark xi. 11-19.

we may betray under a painful disappointment: it was evidently a significant action, designed to convey some important instruction.

He exhibited therein an awful emblem of the Jewish nation, who, with all their profession and show of piety, were destitute of real goodness, and were therefore soon to be devoted to destruction. That guilty people were doomed by his curse, like the figtree, to be reduced from a flourishing to a desolate condition. The case of all vain pretenders to religion is exactly similar. They may appear beautiful to the eye, and raise an expectation in others of much fruit: but, though they stand in the church, they bring no glory to God, and remain unprofitable. He may bear long with them; but his vengeance will fall upon them at the last, and so entirely consume them as to "leave them neither root nor branch "." Ah! what jealousy should this excite in us respecting our own state! When the Lord himself comes to search, will any increase of holiness be found upon us?

When Jesus arrived at Jerusalem, he visited the temple, and again endeavoured to correct the flagrant violations of that sacred place, asserting its proper use, as a house devoted to the service of God. His faithful admonitions, as before, enraged the Scribes and chief priests against him, so that they wished to destroy him instantly; they observed his influence among the people, and dreaded its consequences. In the evening he once more retired from the city; a retreat apparently necessary for his security.

Tuesday in In the morning of the day following, as Passion week. he passed by the same road, his disciples, who accompanied him, expressed their astonishment when they saw the fig-tree withered away +. They perceived in this instance an additional proof of the power of their divine Master, and he taught them

<sup>†</sup> Matt. xxi. 20, &c. Mark xi. 20, &c. xii. 1-12. Luke xx. 1-19.

from it to depend more firmly upon him. He encouraged them to believe that his almighty hand would be exerted in their behalf, and that, while they relied implicitly on the promise of God, they should be enabled to confirm their doctrine by miracles far superior to this. But, that they might perform such extraordinary operations, he exhorted them to offer up importunate prayer to God, with strong faith, assuring them that their most confident expectations of the divine blessing would not be disappointed. He insisted, also, on a charitable forgiving disposition, as so absolutely requisite, that without it all their addresses to God would be ineffectual.

The supernatural powers with which they were invested are not now wanted, and it would be presumption in us to ask for them. But there are advantages and privileges more excellent and valuable which we may look for, and which we should "ask in faith, nothing wavering \*." We need not wonder that our petitions for the influences of the Spirit have failed of success, if we cannot credit God for the performance of his promise, or believe that he will hear us. To ensure a favourable acceptance, we should likewise lay aside our evil tempers when we approach to the God of peace and love. He will not vouchsafe his presence and assistance to those whose hearts burn with resentment one against another. We are to "lift up holy hands without wrath," as well as without " doubting t."

After passing by the barren fig-tree, our Lord came again to Jerusalem, and taught publicly in the temple. The chief priests, Scribes, and elders (which expressions may denote the members of the sanhedrim), being much enraged against him, demanded of him what authority he possessed which could justify his extraordinary conduct. Had the question been proposed with an humble desire of re-

<sup>\*</sup> James i. 6. + 1 Tin

ceiving information, we apprehend that Jesus would have given a different answer; for he never disappointed the serious inquirer. But, knowing the pride and obstinacy of their hearts, he intended, not so much to instruct, as to silence and confound them. He therefore interrogated them on what foundation the ministry of John the Baptist rested: for, since John had borne the most decisive testimony for him, as he himself had for John, they both stood on the same ground. This involved them in a difficulty. They could not allow the prophetical character of John without allowing that of Jesus also; and they dared not deny it, through fear of the people, who held the name of the Baptist in the highest veneration. They were, therefore, obliged to confess their ignorance, and to relinquish their malevolent examination. How admirable was that wisdom, which could at once perplex the most subtle adversaries, and defeat all their

Do not many, also, among ourselves, like those ancient cavillers, demand by what proofs the authority of Jesus is ascertained? We are not afraid of bringing the matter to a fair trial before impartial judges; for the truth cannot suffer by a serious disquisition. But take heed with what temper and motive you weigh the evidences of the Gospel. They are strong enough to convince those who are not biassed by pride or projudice. But, if you enter upon the subject with an unhumbled captious disposition, probably difficulties will occur which will prevent your attaining any satisfaction; and it is a righteous thing with God to permit it. Many, who affect to call themselves free-thinkers, take up the Bible, with no desire to regulate their faith or practice by it, but with a previous determination to raise objections. Can such persons, who are evidently blinded by their passions, be competent to decide upon this subject? Or is it likely, that, while they

resolve not to be persuaded, Jesus will vouchsafe to

guide them by the light of his Spirit?

But, though our Lord seemed to evade the inquiries of his enemies, he still warned them, by a faithful and striking representation of the baseness of their character, and by intimations which they could not mistake, of the awful destruction they should soon feel.

1. He described the different conduct of two sons. who were both directed by their father to work in his vineyard. The first, with great insolence, refused to obev: but afterwards, ashamed of his perverseness, submitted, and fulfilled the injunction. The second, with fair professions of regard, and an express promise of compliance, continued to neglect the command. Jesus then appealed to his auditors upon the case he had proposed; and, while they were obliged to confess that he, who for a time avowed an opposition to his parent's will, had yet performed a more dutiful part than the other, they condemned themselves; for, with high pretences to piety, they were more averse to God's design of saving sinners than the most open and profligate offenders. Our Lord failed not to make this very pointed application; "Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." He referred them for a proof of his assertion to their rejection of John's ministry, to which persons of abandoned character had submitted.

Let all the professors of religion be excited to examine themselves. You say, "I go, Sir;" but are you not acting as dissemblers? With declarations of love and obedience upon your tongues, are you not in your lives and tempers most opposite to God? Have you cordially complied with the scheme of salvation in the Gospel? You may pride yourselves upon your morality or devotion, as the Pharisees did; yet, if you "have not submitted yourselves unto the

righteousness of God," you possess more odious dispositions, and may be further from heaven, than those who are notoriously dissolute and profane. This is an offensive position: but here we discover the malignity and danger of self-dependence, which is more likely to prevent us from a sincere reception of the Saviour than any atrocious crimes; and we perceive, also, the freeness and sufficiency of that grace, which can rescue from destruction the most enormous sinners.

This representation, however, should not be thought favourable to your licentious practices, who have avowedly cast off the fear of God. Your iniquities are detestable before him, and, if not renounced, will "bring upon you swift destruction." But we thank God for the revelation of mercy through his Son; and on this ground we can encourage you to "turn unto him, from whom you have deeply revolted." We are, also, sanguine in the expectation of succeeding with you; for, surely, the Gospel must at once appear suitable to your case, as it is addressed to them "who are ready to perish," and offers a full and gratuitous pardon to the most guilty.

2. He described the base conduct and certain condemnation of the Jews, in a parabolical representation of wicked husbandmen, who were intrusted with the care of a vineyard. The owner sent his servants to demand the produce: but the messengers were treated by them with extreme violence and cruelty; they were beaten, stoned, and killed. At last, as the grand expedient for recovering them to their duty, his only and beloved son was despatched on the same errand: but, though he had a peculiar claim to be received with veneration, they unanimously determined to put

him to death.

Jesus then appealed to his captious hearers; and they allowed that these unfaithful husbandmen should be deprived of that trust which they had abused, and be destroyed for their iniquity. But, in doing this, being blindly inattentive to their own guilt, they bassed sentence on themselves. Jesus also confirmed the sentence, declaring that the kingdom of God, or the dispensation of his mercy, should be withdrawn from them, and committed to another people. He further observed, that a remarkable prophecy was then fulfilled, since the very stone which the builders refused was appointed the headstone of the corner, as the main support of the whole building \*. And he solemnly varned them, that, by taking offence at him or his loctrine, they exposed themselves to the heaviest calamities in this life, and that finally, when his whole rengeance should fall upon them, they would perish with tremendous and irreparable ruin.

The Jewish rulers perceived that the parable which he had delivered was directed against them; and yet the awful admonition did not duly affect them. They hardened their hearts the more, and again they sought for some means of destroying him, that they might no longer be troubled with his reproofs. At that time, however, they dared not to carry their wishes into effect: the multitude, who still revered him as a Prophet, would not suffer them to seize him. We observe that God can restrain the malicious attempts of his fiercest enemies; nor can they ever prevail, "except it be given them from above." A firm persuasion of this truth will inspire the believer with confidence and joy, though "ten thousands of people set themselves against him round about +."

The judgments denounced against the Jews have been fulfilled; and thus God hath "avenged the quarrel of his covenant." Through their unbelief "the kingdom of God" is come unto us: and if we would not provoke him to take it from us, as he has done from them, we should beware of rejecting "the chief corner-stone," which God hath laid in

Psal. cxviii. 22. † iii. 6.

Zion, and on which alone, as "the sure foundation," his church can stand. Let us build our hopes upon him, and we shall never be ashamed \*. But inconceivable anguish, torment, and despair, shall be the portion of all those to whom he is "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even of them which stumble at the word, being disobedient †.' May we so contemplate his character, that he may be more and more exalted in our estimation, till we be admitted to see his face in glory! Amen.

\* Rom. ix. 33. + 1 Pet. ii. 8.

# JESUS CHRIST.

### SECT. 33.

Jesus delivered the parable of the marriage feast—replied to the Pharisees and Herodians, on the payment of tribute—confounded the Sadducees, by proving the resurrection—answered a Scribe, respecting the first and great commandment—baffled the Pharisees, by proposing a question about the Messiah—warned his disciples against the Scribes and Pharirisees, whom he reproved and condemned in the most awful language.

"Where is the wise? where is the Scribe? where is the disputer of this world \*?" Such were the opponents of our Lord; and in their proud and malicious contentions with him they were completely vanquished and confounded. Towards the close of his life, especially, they assailed him with all their subtlety, in order to insnare him; but their best-concerted plans were baffled. We know, also, that all his adversaries, who object to his Gospel, though they may be thought to possess an uncommon degree of sagacity and learning, shall finally be convicted of the grossest folly, be silenced and overcome. "All that are incensed against him shall be ashamed †."

Tuesday in Part of his audience had withdrawn, Passion week, being enraged by his faithful admonitions; but he proceeded to instruct the rest by a very interesting parable ‡. In language something similar to what he had used on a former occasion §, he re-

<sup>\* 1</sup> Cor. i. 20. + Isa. xlv. 42. + Matt. xxii. 1-14. § Sect. 26.

presented the great blessings of the Gospel under the description of a feast. Plenteous provisions, and such as are most exquisite in their nature, are here exhibited. They are sufficient for the supply of every guest, and capable of yielding inexpressible delight. This is more than a common entertainment: it is a royal banquet; what the King of heaven has prepared for the accommodation of his creatures upon earth. It is, also, designed for the celebration of a marriage, the union of his own Son with the church: for Jesus is the Bridegroom of his people, having espoused them to himself. What extensive and un-

paralleled grace does this display!

A numerous company had been desired to give their attendance; but at the proper season, when reminded of their sovereign's expectations, they re-fused to obey his summous. Yet such was his condescension, that after this insult he renewed the invitation, and sent one message upon another, assuring them that his table was richly furnished for their reception, and requesting their presence without delay. Even then his kindness was rejected with disdain, being considered as a matter not worth regarding: for "they made light of it," and turned their attention to their common occupations. Is this a natural description? Are men, in general, backward to partake of a sumptuous entertainment? Do they shun the opportunity of gratifying their sensual appetites? No: but the feast here exhibited is spiritual; and the contempt with which its blessings are usually refused is a decisive proof of our extreme depravity: there is scarcely any thing in life which is not preferred to grace and salvation.

The parable further declares that the servants, who carried their lord's messages, were treated with scorn and violence; and that some of them suffered death. This was exactly what the holy Prophets and Apostles met with from the Jewish nation. Jesus, there-

fore, held up to his hearers a true picture of the persecuting spirit by which both they and their fathers were distinguished; and while he represented the king as utterly destroying his murderous subjects, and reducing their city to ashes, he virtually predicted the divine judgments coming upon them for their rejection of the Gospel. Their fall, however, has contributed to the exaltation of others: we "have

obtained mercy through their unbelief \*."

The invitation to the marriage was enlarged. The sovereign, determined that his preparations should not be ineffectual, called in the strangers and miserable outcasts upon the highways, till the feast was furnished with guests. Thus the Lord God has sent the glad tidings of salvation to sinners of the Gentiles, even to those, who, through their ignorance and profaneness, seem at the greatest distance, and in a state the most deplorably wretched. The ministers of the Gospel are now commissioned to "bid to the marriage as many as they shall find." Whatever, then, may have been your character or condition, we entreat your attendance, and assure you that the Lord will graciously receive you. O refuse not, as others have done to their perdition!

But, if you accept the invitation; you must comply with the rules prescribed, and be properly habited, while you sit down to this entertainment: for "a wedding garment" is provided for the guests. God himself proposes to "cover you with the robe of righteousness," which will render you beautiful in his sight: you cannot, indeed, stand in his presence without it. He will minutely survey the persons who profess a readiness to partake of his feast. Let all the outward members of his church attentively consider that scrutiny which He makes. One is represented as singled out from the rest, being destitute of the vestment required on the occasion, and com-

<sup>\*</sup> Rom, xi, 30.

manded by the lord of the assembly. He was called forth and examined concerning his pretensions to be admitted to that high banquet, and, having nothing to urge in his own defence, was cast out with extreme disgrace. The all-piercing eye of God will detect every hypocrite who may be numbered among his people. It is not enough to join the assemblies of the saints: have we "put on Christ?" If we are unwilling to appear in his righteousness, and presume upon our own worthiness, we cannot be acceptable guests: nor can we escape conviction. " How camest thou in hither?" is a question which will confound thousands, who seem to pay a respect to the Gospel. What, then, is our habit? Are we "clothed with the garment of salvation?" If otherwise, an awful condemnation awaits us; we must be excluded from God and happiness, and consigned to a place of endless and inexpressible torment, anguish, and despair. Ah! what " searchings of heart" become us, since few, in comparison, obtain the efficacious influence of that grace which is tendered to them in the Gospel.

These solemn admonitions of Jesus did not conciliate, but rather the more exasperate, his enemies. Yet they were afraid to take away his life by force, and, therefore, by various schemes, endeavoured to find some plausible pretext for doing it. Accordingly they proposed subtle questions, merely that they might draw from him such answers as would furnish them with a heavy charge against him. The Pharisees left him, and, having consulted together on the best method of effecting their design, joined the Herodians in laying a snare for him \*. These men were of different parties and principles, and yet they could agree in the same diabolical purpose. They came with fair, but feigned, professions of regard and requested our Lord's decision as to the lawfulness of paying tribute to Cæsar the Roman emperor

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xxii. 15-22. Mark xii. 13-17. Luke xx. 20-26.

robably they were confident of involving him in a ery serious difficulty: if he had dissuaded them from ubmitting to the tax, they might have accused him an enemy to the government; or, if he had commanded it, they might have incensed the people against im, as hostile to their liberties.

But how vain are all human devices in opposition God! Jesus perceived their malevolent intentions. ad sharply reproved their hypocrisy. He replied ith peculiar wisdom, so as to make them judge nd condemn themselves in their own cause. They ere forced to confess their subjection to Cæsar, so ong as they received the current coin, which was tamped with that emperor's image. He inferred, herefore, without entering into political debates, hat they should " render to Cæsar the things which rere Cæsar's." A conclusion undeniably just : and qually just was the caution which he subjoined, hat God also has demands upon us, which ought, at east, to be as much regarded and complied with as hose of our earthly governors. They were astonished t the prudence and propriety of this answer, and bliged for that time to abandon their purpose.

Let us, then, attend to our Lord's decision, and eriously consider what we owe both to God and the cing. These duties are not incompatible with each other: we cannot plead that we truly "fear God," fee do not "honour the king." Are we giving him that reverence and support which are due to his tation and authority? Do we utter contemptuous tation and authority? Do we utter contemptuous tation and authority? Do we study raudulent methods of evading the taxes which are mposed, or pay them with a peevish discontent? Surely such a conduct is as repugnant as disgraceful to the profession of religion. But, though we have maintained our loyalty and submission to the reigning powers, have we not neglected the God of heaven?

Has he no rights, no claims upon us? Or shall we presume that he will not assert them? "Will a marob God?" Would not the attempt imply consummate ignorance, pride, and fool-hardiness? Yet we all have done it. We have not admired his perfections, honoured his government, obeyed his law, to believed in his Gospel, as we ought. We have not rendered all proper reverence and attention to his name, his sabbaths, his house, or ministers. "Entenot into judgment with thy servants, O Lord!"

On the same day a different set of men attacker the Saviour \*. The Sadducees, who denied a futur state, came and started a difficulty against the resurrection of the body, which they ridiculed. They urged that seven brethren, having been married in succession to the same woman, could not all clain her as their wife in the world to come. But Jesus declared that their opinions evinced an ignorance of the Scriptures, and of the mighty power of God. since that power can easily restore life to the dead however improbable the event may seem, and the Scriptures expressly assert that they shall rise. He argued, that all the distinctions and relations, which subsist among us on earth, will have no place hereafter. There may be a knowledge of those to whom we are now closely united; but all those partial attachments and connexions, which bind us to one another, will then be done away, as inconsistent with the perfection of the heavenly state. Their objection, therefore, fell to the ground. He showed also, even from the books of Moses, which they professed to receive, that Jehovah had evidently given intimations of a future state, by calling himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, long after those patriarchs were deceased: we may thence conclude that departed saints are not perished; but that, as God is their God, their spirits are now with him, and their dust shall awake \* Matt. xxii, 23 -33. Mark xii, 18-27. Luke xx. 27-40. gain, to live in his presence for ever. Thus they ere completely vanquished, and dared not to renew heir attack.

Do not modern free-thinkers, like the ancient ladducees, betray their ignorance and perverseness v the difficulties which they start on the subject of eligion? We would, therefore, address them in the ords of Jesus, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scripares, nor the power of God." We entreat you to renquish your speculations, which will certainly turn o your confusion. To be possessed of a captious disosition, and a fondness for dispute, is accounted, in he estimate of reason, no mark of wisdom or humility. t is easy to propose what the most intelligent canot resolve, and to perplex what human ingenuity annot unravel. Such cavilling may furnish amuseent to your fancy, and adulation to your pride. But, hile you refuse to hear the simple declarations of fod's word, and oppose to them your own arrogant ecisions, you exalt yourselves above your Maker, and such will ever be the doom of the proud deceiver) you ill perish in your vain imaginations.

But, though the Sadducees declined the contest rith Jesus, the Pharisees still renewed it, as if they rere confident of succeeding better\*. One of their sarned doctors came forward with a question, inending to try his knowledge of divine revelation. It seems to have been disputed among them which ras the most important and necessary precept: some referred ceremonies, and other sacrifices, while the enerality paid little regard to that extensive holisiess which is indispensably required. Upon this ionit, therefore, the Scribe appealed to Jesus, and btained a decisive answer. The Saviour discovered tonce a complete understanding of the sacred law, n its full import, while he declared that its grand lemand is love; love, the most ardent of which we

Matt. xxii. 34, &c. Mark xii. 28—37. Luke xx. 41—44.

are capable, to the one supreme Jehovah, and love for the whole human species, as sincere as that which we feel for ourselves. The Jewish doctor perceived and acknowledged the excellence of this reply, and joined in asserting that the principle o obedience, which our Lord laid down, was far more valuable and acceptable to God than all ceremonia observances or expensive sacrifices. It appeared, then that the Scribe, though he had come with an impro per temper, possessed more consistent sentiments of divine truth than were usually found among the Pha risees, and such as tended to lead him to an unfeigne acceptance of the Gospel. On this ground Jesus com mended the solidity of his judgment, and considered him as promising fair for the kingdom of God. Wha the event was we are not told.

The subject here proposed is highly interesting have we attended to it? Do we understand what i of main importance in religion? Are we aware of the extensive and spiritual nature of God's mora law? Do we approve and admire its precepts, a " holy, and just, and good?" Do we live under the influence of that sacred principle of love, which is required in preference to every thing besides, and without which nothing can be pleasing to God? I is, indeed, the sum and substance of all those duties which the inspired writers have inculcated, and is properly called "the fulfilling of the law "." Every transgression shows a defect of this disposition; for if it maintained an entire and constant ascendancy it would certainly lead to the full perfection of obedience. But our failure is continual, and of lamentable obliquity. Our desires and affections, if examined by this test, will every day convict us of guilt We come far short of that regard which we owe both to God and man; and nothing which we can possibly plead will compensate the want of it.

<sup>\*</sup> Rom. xiii. 10.

The Pharisees still surrounded our Lord, and proably meditated a fresh attack. But he, the more ompletely to baffle and confound them, proposed a juestion, and called upon them to declare their opition of the extraction of Messiah, whom they proessed to look for. He started a difficulty from their wan Scriptures, which they could not resolve. They were agreed that the Christ, the promised Saviour, must be "the Son of David;" and they could not deny that David, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, speaks of him as his Lord\*. When urged, therefore, to explain in what sense he could be the Son, and yet the Lord, of David, they could not reply. They felt themselves overpowered, and relinquished their vain disputations, though they still retained all their malevolence.

To us, also, the inquiry may be addressed, and an important one it is, "What think ye of Christ?" Have vou formed consistent and scriptural sentiments of his person and descent? Or, how do you remove the difficulty, as it is here stated? If it be admitted that Christ is very God, as well as very man, the seeming absurdity and contradiction is done away. In his human nature he is "the Son of David, according to the flesh;" but, by a divine nature only, he is "David's Lord." Thus he styles himself "The Root and the Offspring of David +." But if we represent him as no more than a creature like ourselves, and as having no higher original than earthly parents, the whole is strange and incongruous. The question will still recur, and cannot be answered, " How doth David in spirit call him Lord?" If we abide by the plain and express declarations of the Bible, we shall readily allow that Jesus is "Immanuel," "God manifested in the flesh:" no other doctrine will reconcile the various passages which relate to him. And this important position being established, we may

<sup>\*</sup> Psal. cx. 1. + Rev. xxii. 16.

rejoice and triumph, as it lays a secure and immovable

foundation for our hope towards God.

Jesus continued through the day to teach, admo nish, and reprove. Addressing himself to his dis ciples, in the audience of all the people, he solemnly warned them to beware of the pride and hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees, whom he severely condemned. The sentence and the language were similar to those on a former occasion, of awful and impressive import \*: " As far as they speak to you in God's name, and agreeably to his word, they demand your respect and obedience. But their conduct is inconsistent with their own instructions: be therefore afraid of being misled by their pernicious examples. They assume an appearance of great sanctity, and scrupulously practise many religious ceremonies; but they act, throughout, from the basest principles; their only aim is to gain the notice and applause of men. Their ostentation and vain glory are detestable, while they affect such distinctions and titles as lead the people to compliment their piety and learning. But you, my disciples, must be far different, not taking to yourselves any state, or courting appellations of honour and precedency. You must live as brethren, who have but one Father and one Master, and be willing to submit to the meanest office, exhibiting a pattern of lowliness and self-abasement. Such a temper is indispensably requisite, since God will confound the man who shall dare to exalt himself, and He will favour none but the humble."

Have we, then, attended to the exhortation, which equally concerns all the followers of Jesus? Do we possess that meekness of spirit, so essential to the Christian character? Are there no proud contentions among us for superiority of rank? And do we cheerfully condescend and steep to our inferiors, for their

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xxiii. 1, &c. Mark xii. 38-40. Luke xx. 4, 5, &c. See Sect. 24.

benefit? Or again, while we pay a due respect to those in higher life, do we reverence God and our conscience above all? Do we remember, as we ought, that we are accountable, not to men, but to God, who "searcheth the heart," and that "One is our Master, even Christ?"

When Jesus had delivered these cautions, he turned himself to the Scribes and Pharisees, who still, probably, expected to find some ground of accusation against him. He then addressed them with peculiar majesty, and as one invested with sovereign authority. In the capacity of their Judge, he arraigned, he convicted them, and, for their secret iniquity, pronounced upon them the heaviest condemnation. From one sentence to another, each containing a discovery of their wickedness and a memorial of their folly, we hear, in awful and prophetic repetition, the word of warning and tremendous denunciation breaking forth from his lips. Yet who shall blame the intimations of judgment? Who shall wonder that the cry was "Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees?" Let us read the long black roll of their offences: let us mark the charges brought by their unprejudiced

They discovered an obstinate and malevolent opposition to the Gospel, not only rejecting it themselves, but, with a furious bigotry, preventing others from receiving it. They practised the most cruel oppressions, even upon the widow and the fatherless, and yet covered their injustice with a show of uncommon ardour in devotion. Their pretences to religion rendered their extortion the more detestable; and therefore Jesus declared that their boasted prayers would aggravate their damnation. They showed great zeal to grain proselytes, not for the glory of God, but their own reputation; and they were so earnest to confirm each convert in error and hatred of the truth, as to make his case more deplorable and hopeless than

that of his seducer. They endeavoured, by specious arguments and curious distinctions, to justify their profane use of oaths, as if they might be allowed to swear in certain forms of speech, and contracted not any high degree of guilt by falsifying their solemn affirmations. But Jesus convicted them of horrid impiety and perjury, while he asserted that such appeals to the temple and the altar as they pleaded for were no other than appeals to God himself.

They paid a scrupulous attention to some trifles, which exalted their reputation; but neglected the most important and necessary duties. Their religious zeal was confined to external observances: they sought not real purity of heart. They were satisfied with so much of the appearance of sanctity as would procure them admiration among the people, while their vile affections exposed them to the contempt and indignation of that righteous God, to whom all

their secret iniquity lay open.

They pretended a high veneration for those holy men whom their fathers had murdered. But, though they professed to honour deceased saints by building and adorning their sepulchres, they persecuted the living, and thus proved that they inherited the same violent hatred of genuine piety as their ancestors. Jesus therefore declared, that, by their continued progress in wickedness, they would soon fill up their measure, and be ripe for destruction. So obdurate were they, that he considered them as on the brink of final perdition, ready to sink down into "the damnation of hell." Yet further means were to be tried with them. Apostles and other ministers were to be sent among them, to bear witness of the truth: but our Lord predicted, that, by their cruel and sanguinary opposition to those his honoured servants, they would provoke God more and more, till at length he should arise to take exemplary vengeance upon that very generation, and reckon with them for all the righteous blood which had been shed from the begin-

ning of the world.

How deplorable was their case! Jesus, being deeply affected at the prospect of their approaching miseries, broke forth into a pathetic lamentation. They were the same accents of pity by which he had twice before expressed the yearnings of his bowels \*. From this part of his conduct it appears, that, though he pronounced the most tremendous woes, judgment is "his strange work." He bewailed the murderous city, which had long been the seat of persecution, and which had scornfully resisted all his efforts of love for the salvation of her children. He would have cherished and protected them, as a hen her tender brood; but they had obstinately rejected his gracious proposals. At last, therefore, insulted mercy was about to be withdrawn, and give place to unrelenting justice: and that hand, which had been long stretched out with offers of richest blessings, was soon to be lifted up with a rod of indignation to desolate their country, and destroy them for ever. Thus Jesus took a solemn farewell of the temple, to return no more: he warned the impenitent sinners around him, and predicted that at his future advent they would acknowledge his divine character, and be glad to join in those ac-clamations of praise which had lately been forbidden in that house, saying, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord."

What solemn things are these! Surely, if they are seriously regarded, they must leave a deep impression upon our minds. Let us, then, make the application to ourselves, rather than to the ancient Pharisees.

1. A striking exhibition is here given of the character of Jesus. Behold, how tender his compassion, how extensive his grace! He seeks after those who are ready to perish, and, with repeated and impor-

<sup>\*</sup> Sect. 25 and 31.

tunate solicitations, entreats them to hide themselves "under the shadow of his wings," where alone they can be safe and happy. O, why are we unwilling to accept his offers? Let us also remark how strict are his proceedings, when "he lays judgment to the line." How terrible the effects of his anger! Who, then, shall presume to contend with Him? If we refuse to honour him by our unfeigned compliance, he will glorify

himself in our everlasting destruction.

2. Let not the faithful ministers of Christ be reproached for endeavouring, like their Lord and Master, to admonish and reprove their careless hearers. In performing that painful part of their office, they do not assume the authority of a judge: but if, as the mouth of God, they should declare his whole will without reserve, they must denounce vengeance as well as proclaim mercy. From the example of Jesus we see that this is consistent with the exercise of perfect compassion and meekness. And shall you charge with uncharitableness and pride those who "watch for your souls," because they think themselves bound to address the wicked, even in the very strong language of the Saviour, "How can ye escape the damnation of hell?"

3. Let us seriously examine our own character. What is our state? What our expectation? Do we not, in some respect or other, betray a temper or conduct similar to that of the Pharisees? Much we have heard of their hypocrisy: let us fear to put on, as they did, a profession of piety "for a cloak of maliciousness;" this would be more detestable than avowed infidelity. Yet let not pure religion be laid aside because we abhor the vile dissimulation of those who have nothing but a fair appearance. Some are vehement in their invectives against the men who "for a pretence make long prayers," while they themselves never pray at all. These persons may not come under the condemnation of Pharisees, but

they shall not escape the judgment of God for their impiety; and, if they perish for ever, it will be no comfort to them that others are suffering a still

greater degree of torment.

O, let us welcome the Saviour, while we adopt that expressive acclamation, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord;" that, "when he shall appear" the second time, "we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming \*!" Amen.

\* 1 John ii. 28.

## JESUS CHRIST.

#### SECT. 34.

Jesus commended the liberality of a poor widow—predicted the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, and the various signs and circumstances attending it—forefold, also, his coming to judgment, and exhorted to watchfulness.

Jesus, having pronounced a tremendous sentence upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and declared that "their house was left unto them desolate," withdrew from that beautiful edifice, in which they gloried as their brightest ornament and surest defence. He

departed from the temple to return no more.

Yet, before he went out, he paused, and remarked the readiness with which the various worshippers cast their money into the treasury, for the necessary expenses of the divine service \*. Many opulent persons contributed much; but he fixed his eyes upon a poor widow, while she was throwing in her two mites, and pointed her out to his disciples as an object of his peculiar regard. He knew her straitened circumstances; he saw and approved the inward principle of her heart. The value of her oblation was trifling, but it included the whole of her little property. Our Lord, therefore, represented her liberality as more enlarged and more acceptable to God than the costly offerings of the wealthy, who had given up only a small part of their superfluity, and still retained every enjoyment as before. We learn from this short narration that it is incumbent upon all to communicate, according to

<sup>\*</sup> Mark xii. 41, &c. Luke xxi. 1-4.

their ability, for the advancement of religion, as well as for the relief of the afflicted; that such as are indigent are not excused from the duty; and that He, "by whom actions are weighed," will commend and recompense the least donations which spring from faith and love.

Jesus was leaving the temple, when his disciples took the opportunity of remarking to him the extent and magnificence of the building, supposing probably that he would express his admiration \*. But he turned off their attention from the consideration of its grandeur to that of its approaching demolition, when not one stone should remain upon another. He then retired to the mount of Olives, which afforded him a prospect of the sacred edifice; and while he sat there, perhaps contemplating the destruction which he had foretold, some of his Apostles inquired privately how soon his prophecies would be fulfilled, and what particular signals would precede the great events. His reply to the question contains various circumstantial predictions, which, when compared with their exact accomplishment, furnish the strongest evidence in support of the Gospel, and stand as an impregnable barrier against the assaults of infidelity. He addressed his disciples to the following purpose:-

"It is necessary for you to be upon your guard against vain pretenders; for many impostors shall arise, assuming the name and character of the Messiah, and affecting to set up his kingdom. Dreadful commotions and distresses, also, shall be permitted, before the appointed desolation of the Jews; but you ought not, on that account, to be terrified or surprised. You will hear of the alarms of war, seditions, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes; and tremendous appearances shall be seen in the air; yet, awful as these may be, they are intended only

as presages of far severer calamities.

<sup>&</sup>quot; Matt. varv. 1. &c. Mark viii. I, &c. Lake avi. 5. &c.

"You, my beloved friends, will stand in need of a peculiar degree of courage. For, previous to those national judgments, the most violent persecutions shall be raised against you; so that you may expect, in my service, universal hatred, stripes, imprisonment, and death itself. Hereby, indeed, an honour will be conferred upon you. While you are called to answer for yourselves, you will have the opportunity of bearing witness to the truth before kings and rulers of the earth, and evincing the excellence of your principles. You may tremble, perhaps, under an apprehension, that, because you are destitute of learning and eloquence, you shall not be able to vindicate my Gospel as you ought, and may therefore be confounded in the presence of your judges. But you need not be anxious on this account, since the Holy Ghost will support you, and furnish you with proper arguments and words; and I pledge myself to give you such utterance and wisdom as shall render you superior to all the subtlety and power of your enemies.

"This fierce opposition to my cause will stagger many of its professed friends, and induce them to desert it. Through the fear of persecution, they will apostatize from the truth, and betray their nearest relations, who steadfastly maintain it; so that one brother shall treacherously deliver up another to the hand of violence, the father his son, the children their parents. What then have you to look for but general contempt and abhorrence? Yet a peculiar protection, extending even to your minutest concerns, shall be afforded you; in dependence upon which, you may possess an unshaken firmness and composure of mind.

"Many false teachers, also, shall arise, and spread destructive errors: and, through the prevalence of iniquity, not a few of those, who have shown much love for my name, shall decline from their spirituality and zeal. In the midst of such difficulties, you may

be perplexed, and ready to abandon my service: but I exhort you to persevere through all extremities, having respect to the glorious recompense of reward which is set before you. For your encouragement, I assure you that your word shall not be ineffectual; and that, by your means, weak as you are, the Gospel of my grace shall be promulgated from kingdom to kingdom, and make its way against all opposition to every nation of the known world. After that event the end shall come; the Jewish state shall be concluded, the city and temple laid in ruins, and both the civil and ecclesiastical polity totally destroyed.

"There are, likewise, nearer signs, and certain attendant circumstances of this approaching devastation, which you will carefully remark. According to Daniel's prophecy\*, you will see the Roman armies (properly called 'the abomination of desolation,' as being detestable for their idolatry, and as laying waste all before them) erecting their standards upon the holy ground, and investing Jerusalem. Let this be considered as a signal that you must immediately quit the place, which is about to be demolished, and retreat to the mountainous part of the country, for the preservation of your lives. Without regarding your substance, or even your apparel, fly upon the very first notice, with the utmost haste, or you will perish in the general calamity. These troubles will be peculiarly distressing; they will be fraught with wo to pregnant women, and to the mother, whose tender infant still hangs upon her breast. Do you, also, pray that your departure may not happen in the winter, and that the day of your flight may not be the sabbath. The former would add new hazards to your escape, and new horrors to your banishment; whilst the latter, in its necessity, would disturb that sacred invaluable rest, and aggravate the griefs of the fugitive from Zion and Jerusalem.

<sup>\*</sup> Dan. ix. 26.

"As to this unhappy people, who are devoted to destruction, their case will be most deplorable indeed; for the afflictions which await them will be extreme, far surpassing every instance that has yet been known, or that shall occur again. A most tremendous slaughter shall take place among them; and those who escape the edge of the sword shall be dispersed, in a state of wretched captivity, among all the nations of the world. Their well-fortified city shall be razed to its very foundations, and remain in the possession of the Gentiles till God's appointed time for the triumph of the Gentiles shall be completed. Should the horrid carnage and devastation continue long, the whole Jewish race would be quite extirpated. But God, who still retains a purpose of mercy towards them, will preserve them as a separate people; agreeably to that declaration, 'Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it \*."

"During these troubles many deceivers will arise, and, under the assumed character of the Messiah, promise deliverance. By specious arts and uncommon operations they will obtain much credit; and, if the grace of God did not prevent, they would even pervert from the truth my chosen followers. But you are required to take heed; and these my predictions may be the means of your security. Be not, therefore, induced to join any vain pretenders; for the calamities which I have foretold are unavoidable. The Son of man will come, as he hath said, like the lightning, which is sudden and terrible in its appearance, and irresistible in its effects. He will come, as in flaming fire, to plead the cause of his Gospel, and to inflict exemplary vengeance on his enemies. Under his commission, the Roman soldiers, bearing the eagle on their standards, shall fly to the destruction of this devoted nation, as the devouring eagles to their prey. The awful desolation shall also be attended, even as my final advent, with many surprising sights in the heavens, and with great commotions,

anguish, and terror, upon the earth."

Before we proceed further with our Lord's solemn admonitions, let us pause awhile, and seriously meditate on these prophecies, so express and circumstantial as to deserve our most earnest regard. They are so strong, as to be sufficient of themselves, were there no other evidence, to prove the truth of the Gospel. If the events have not answered these descriptions, then may Jesus be rejected as a base impostor, and his whole system of doctrine derided, as no better than an artful fiction. But if, indeed, what he minutely foretold has been exactly accomplished, what shall we say? Can there a doubt remain concerning his mission, or the respect which is due to him?

It is generally allowed that those effects, which are clearly and undeniably miraculous, when produced in support of any position, are a full and incontestable confirmation of it. Now prophecies are no other than miracles, perhaps the most striking which can possibly be exhibited. To predict future events, which lie beyond the reach of conjecture, and which at the time appear highly improbable; to do this in a circumstantial manner, is as wonderful, and as plainly shows a divine interposition, as opening the eyes of the blind, or raising the dead to life. Yet this is what the Saviour has done. Nay, he has delivered such prophecies as yet continue to be fulfilled among ourselves. These, therefore, are like a standing miracle, and afford us a stronger attestation of his Gospel than even those were favoured with who both saw and heard him.

He declared, as we have remarked upon the subject before us, many things which were unlikely to take place, and which he could not have pointed out by any human acuteness or penetration. They were,

also, most offensive to the people around him, and such, therefore, as impostors, whose grand aim is to conciliate favour, would never have asserted. Nor is the application of his words doubtful: they are so express and particular, as to seem more like a history of the past than a prediction of the future. In confirmation of this remark, we appeal to those who have related the facts as they really happened. Josephus, a Jewish writer, is in this view one of the strongest advocates for Christianity. He was present in the Roman camp at the destruction of Jerusalem, an eye-witness of the desolations of the siege and the capture; and his account so exactly verifies our Lord's declarations, as to furnish the best comment upon them. We might conclude that the historian himself was raised up and preserved by the providence of God on purpose to attest the truth of the Gospel, even contrary to his own intentions.

It would be unsuitable to our contracted plan to produce large extracts from different authors in support of the words of Christ, or to give a distinct exposition of the Evangelists. But it may be proper to fix our regard on a few remarkable particulars, which

correspond to the predictions before us.

The temple of Jerusalem has been destroyed by the very people whom our Lord mentioned. Yet that event was unlikely, considering the peace which then subsisted, and the strength of the fortress, which was generally thought impregnable. The Romans did not wish to demolish the holy citadel: the commander issued out his orders and laboured earnestly to preserve it; and when he found his own schemes baffled, he was so struck as to declare that the Jews must be under the avenging hand of God. All the preceding and attendant circumstances also fell out as Jesus had described; such as seditions, famines, earthquakes, eclipses, meteors, a comet, which resembled a flaming sword, hanging over Jerusalem, and contending armies

in the air: such also were the immense slaughter of the Jews, and the entire subjection of those who survived the massacre. The bare relation of the extreme distress and anguish universally felt on that melancholy occasion would be enough to draw tears of compassion from the most obdurate enemy.

The remarkable deliverance of the Christians, like-

wise, fulfilled our Lord's words; for many of them, observing the appointed signal, fled from the devoted city, and were rescued from destruction. They were separated, as the Israelites from the midst of the Egyptians; and "their lives were given unto

them for a prey."

The very rapid propagation of the Gospel, which was preached in all the principal nations of the known world before Jerusalem was taken, is another striking fact, which proves that Jesus is a true Prophet. Christian churches were very early planted in various kingdoms upon the ruins of idolatry; which must have previously appeared utterly improbable, and can be ascribed only to the divine interposition. A doctrine very opposite to men's carnal affections, and striking at the root of all the religions then established, made its way with surprising energy, in spite of all human wisdom and power, which were employed to oppose it. The instruments also of accomplishing this work were in themselves so weak and contemptible, as to show that their success was miraculous. were indeed, as their Lord foretold, universally hated and persecuted, beyond any other people, for their system of faith; yet they prevailed. What, then, shall we say? Does not such a victory, such a completion of an express prophecy, furnish a strong argument for the truth and authority of the Gospel?

In the same view we appeal to the dispersion of the Jews. Their city and temple were laid in ruins, and their frequent attempts to rebuild them have turned to their greater confusion. Julian, the Reman em-

peror, encouraging them to it, was several times baffled in his profane purpose by the eruption of balls of fire from the earth, which consumed the artificers and their materials. No other reason can be given than this, that God will not suffer the declaration of his Son to fail, "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles" for a determined season. We see the Jews unable to recover the holy land, scattered over the face of the earth, and for above seventeen hundred years deprived of the true exercise of their ancient religion. Even now, in their best circumstances, they enjoy but the precarious toleration of that which remains, and are united in no form of civil government. Contemplating their destitute condition, and their want of almost all the common bonds of union, we wonder that they are still a separate people, and still preserved. Most other ancient nations are long since extinct, their posterity being mixed, and lost in the general mass of mankind. But the Jews incorporate with no others; they remain perfectly unconnected with the various communities where they are permitted to dwell, and are as so many witnesses of the truth both of the Old and New Testament, for they have fulfilled the prophecies of both.

From these Scriptures we are likewise led to expect their future restoration, which is as clearly fore-told as their dispersion. We have every reason, therefore, to believe, that it shall certainly be accomplished, when "the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." Indeed the Jews seem to be preserved in their present distinct state for that very end: and, whenever their return shall take place, it will introduce a greater enlargement of the church than has ever yet been known. "For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead \*?"

Yet, while we mourn for the present blindness of

<sup>\*</sup> Rom. xi. 15.

Israel, let us be solicitous for ourselves, that we may not despise and reject the Saviour as they have done. We trace the whole of their unparalleled calamities to that one sin: and is it not as offensive to God in us as in the Jews? Will it not infallibly bring down upon us his fierce indignation? Can we be so infatuated as to show a contempt for the Gospel, while we behold that devoted nation marked out by the curse of God for this very reason? And may we not fear that many readers, with an external profession of Christianity, do not pay a serious regard to the great Prophet of our God, but make light of all his gracious proposals? Shall you, then, escape for your iniquity? He "whom man despiseth, whom the nation abhorreth,' cometh to devour his adversaries, by a destruction infinitely more tremendous than that of Jerusalem. And if you continue to resist him, how will you "abide the day of his coming? How will you stand when he appeareth?"

Of that his final advent, and the awful solemnities attending it, our Lord proceeded to warn his disciples, after having described his appearance to take vengeance of the Jewish nation. He was evidently led from the consideration of one event to that of the other; and, many of the concomitant circumstances being exactly similar, we may be the less surprised at the difficulty of deciding to which some of his expressions are to be referred. They may be true of both; or they may be applicable to one in a lower, and to the other in a more exalted, meaning. Nor should this be objected to, as it is perfectly agreeable to the language of prophecy, especially when any occurrence is represented as the sign or earnest of something more remote \*. In such cases the transition is frequently made before we are

Lowth De Sarra Poesi Hebr. Prælect. xi. See also Bp. Hurd's Introduction to the Study of the Prophecies.

<sup>\* &</sup>quot;Una eademque oratio, dispari sensu accepta, plures simul eventus, disjunctos tempore, natura dissimiles, designat."

aware: and the former subject resumed, which seemed

for a while to be dropped.

The destruction of Jerusalem is a pledge to us of the future judgment. As the Jewish polity was totally subverted, immediately after the calamities mentioned above, so Jesus reminds us that he will come quickly, to put an end to the present frame and system of things. When all those preceding dispensations which are predicted shall be fully accomplished, the whole fabric of this visible creation shall be shaken, and He will appear in the clouds of heaven with glorious majesty. While every eye shall see him, an inexpressible consternation shall take place among all the families of the earth, and ten thousand times ten thousand shall be confounded at his presence. A separation shall then be made. As he rescued his faithful disciples from the Jewish devastation, so he will be mindful of all his chosen people. and preserve them amidst the terrors of the last day. He will commission his angels to gather them together, and conduct them to glory. O, joyful hour to them, who are medeemed to God from the earth! You, who have fled for refuge to the Saviour, may welcome his approach, and rejoice at those awful events, which will hasten the consummation of your bliss. In the prospect of it, you may look up with triumphant exultation, for it will not be long delayed.

Jesus observed to his disciples, that, as they considered the first budding of the trees an intimation of the return of summer, so they might judge, from the hints which he gave them, when the important change was drawing nigh. He assured them that the holy city should be destroyed before that generation should be extinct; and accordingly, in about forty years, it was totally demolished. He declared, also, that, though the whole frame of the material world shall perish, not one particle of his prophecies shall fail. The final dissolution, then, of all things, will

retainly take place; but the precise time is not recaled, for it remains a deep and unsearchable secret a the mind of the eternal Father. Yet, though no arch particular warnings be afforded us of the last lay, as of the desolation of Judea, we should be coninually looking forwards to it, with the utmost awe

and solemnity of mind.

According to our Lord's admonition, his appearince, whensoever it shall be, will be sudden and terible: as the flood swept away; the generation of Noah, he will surprise and destroy many in the midst of their worldly occupations and sensual enjoyments. The sinners, who are at ease, shall instantly be overwhelmed with confusion and horror; and an awful distinction shall be made between many of those, who may then be in the same house or field, engaged together in the same employment. They, who are most intimately united upon earth, may hereafter be parted asunder, and unalterably appointed to different states, as they may differ in their characters. "One shall be taken" to the presence, the glory, and the throne of God; "and the other left" to receive the due reward of his deeds, and endure the fierceness of divine wrath.

What a tremendous subject is this! Can we forget it, or treat it with levity? Why are we not more affected by the thought that "the Judge standeth before the door?" He will summon us to his bar; and we must "give account of ourselves to him." How shall we abide the scrutiny of that strict and impartial trial? We hear that some shall be separated from their dearest connexions in life, and consigned to a place of misery. Does not this excite in us a holy jealousy for ourselves, and rouse us to inquire what is to be done? Let us listen to our Lord's application, in which he exhorts us to a serious and continual preparation for his coming.

Is it an unquestionable truth that "He will judge

the world in righteousness?" And is the time un certain? How proper is the inference, "Watch y therefore-take heed to yourselves-and pray alway -be ye ready!' Keep at a distance from ever thing which would expose you to his displeasure, o be inconsistent with an habitual expectation of hi advent. Beware, lest on any occasion your hearts be oppressed by intemperance, or an inordinate attention to secular affairs; for these would bring a stupor upon you, and prevent you from possessing, as you ought, a constant readiness to meet your Lord. Ah how many will be found in such a thoughtless state that they will be surprised and overwhelmed with horror at his appearance! It is necessary, therefore that you exercise an unceasing vigilance and circumspection, if you would escape the confusion and misery which they will endure.

How carefully do you guard your habitations against designs of violence in the night season! If you had any reason to apprehend an assault from robbers, you would not dare to compose yourselves to sleep. Though you know not the particular hour when the attack may be made, you will provide for the security of your persons, families, and property, and take every previous measure to defeat the invader's purposes. O, be wise for eternity! Should your Lord come upon you unawares, the consequence would be infinitely more terrible than the ransacking of your houses by the midnight plunderer. Be therefore jealous guardians, where negligence must be

followed by destruction.

Your present situation in the church of Christ is like that of servants and stewards, to whom their master, upon his departure, hath intrusted the affairs of his family, and assigned their proper employment. It should be your concern, then, to be faithful and diligent, attending to your appointed work, that, when your Lord returns, he may find you occupied

n your place, and you may give up your accounts with joy. If such be your readiness to meet him, you will be inconceivably blessed. Marks of distinguished honour, and the possession of an everlasting singdom, will be conferred upon you. Will not the prospect of that glory support and comfort you in all your difficulties, and animate you to greater exertions of zeal and self-denial?

How strange is that indifference which men discover about their eternal state! Many, evidently, resemble the treacherous and wicked servant, who, presuming upon his master's longer absence, neglects and abuses his trust by oppression and intemperance.

Being surprised in his folly, and unexpectedly called to account, he will be punished with severest vengeance. O, do not thus flatter yourselves, that, because death and judgment may be far distant, you may safely indulge in sensual excesses! Your Lord may come when you are least aware, while you are totally engrossed with pleasurable schemes: and then what terror and anguish will seize and rend your guilty souls!

As he will be inexorable, "he will cut you asunder, and appoint you your portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

But were these solemn exhortations of Jesus designed for you? Yes: he himself has made the universal application; for he declares "What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch." O, live in a constant mindfulness of that word! Fly to him for mercy, before he come to execute judgment; and seek for the renewing influence of his Spirit, that "you may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." Then shall you be able to meet him at the last with that triumphant acclamation, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad, and rejoice in his salvation \*." Amen.

<sup>\*</sup> Isa. xxv. 9.

## JESUS CHRIST.

### SECT. 35.

Jesus inculcated a serious preparation for his coming by the parables of the ten virgins, and of the talents, and then gave a particular description of the last judgment.

THE Son of man will come again, but not as in the days of his humiliation. He will come, not as "a man of sorrows," but as "the Lord of glory;" not to offer himself a sacrifice, but to execute judgment; not to contend with the opposition of sinners, but to manifest the character, and determine the everlasting condition, of each individual in the whole human race. He himself has told us that he will return for these very purposes, and we profess to expect it. "What manner of persons," then, "ought we to be in all holy "conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God \*!"

We have already contemplated the Saviour, as he sat upon the mount of Olives, foretelling his final advent, and exhorting his disciples to make a suitable We shall now consider the conclusion of his solemn address on the same occasion, in which he gives stronger and sublimer representations of that grand event, and enforces the duty of constant watchfulness and diligent application to our proper work. May we proceed to the interesting subject with true seriousness of mind, and with fervent prayer that it may produce its due influence upon us!

By an affecting parable Jesus exhibited the present state of things in his visible church, the different cha-

<sup>\* 2</sup> Pet. iii, 11, 12.

racters of its members, and the different reception they will meet with from him at the last day \*. Ten virgins are described as attending at the celebration of a marriage, and preparing to meet the bridegroom, that they may conduct his bride by the light of their lamps, according to the ancient custom of nuptials in the East. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Bridegroom here signified, who will shortly come to complete the union with his illustrious spouse, and receive her to his own glorious kingdom. In the mean time, all those who profess the Gospel are required to hold themselves in a state of readiness, that they may obey his summons, and accompany him on that occasion to his heavenly mansions. Such was the office of the virgins: ah! how widely did they differ from each other! "Five of them were wise, and five were foolish," Yet this difference was not easily discernible till the closing scene. They all took their lamps, as if they were properly prepared to attend upon the bridegroom, and waited for his appearance. But the wise only were furnished with oil sufficient to supply their lamps when their original stock should be exhausted. The foolish provided not for a future hour; they were satisfied with just so much as would afford them light for the present.

An apt resemblance is here exhibited of an awful distinction which really subsists among the professed followers of Christ, however it may now be concealed from us by specious disguises. Such as are evidently careless, and have not even the show of piety, come not under the description of the parable. Their danger is too manifest to be doubted. But of those, who seem to be strictly religious, and warmly attached to the service of Christ, all possess not the same holy principle in their hearts. Some only are truly "wise unto salvation," being inwardly what their external profession imports. They have received forgiveness of

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xxv. 1, &c.

their sins, and are renewed in rightcousness, so that, whenever their Lord shall come, they will be found an acceptable people in his sight. The vital and operative influence of divine grace dwells within them, and is their security for a future day: by this they persevere to the end, and therefore will be saved.

Others, alas! with fair appearances deceive both themselves and the church around them. They "have a form of godliness," which procures them esteem; and with this they are content. They may be regular in their conduct, and blameless before men; they may be zealous for right doctrines, and strict in all ritual observance of religion. Yet they are "foolish," in neglecting to look forward and provide for death and judgment. They may make a glittering show for the present; but, possessing not "the new heart and the new spirit," nor being truly united to Christ, they cannot endure the approaching trial, or be "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." The Lord alone can infallibly discern this great difference between persons whose professions and appearances are the same: but it becomes us to search ourselves, for our character and state will soon be determined for ever.

Through the delay of the bridegroom, the painfulness of watching overcame the virgins: the protracted duty of a sentinel wearied their spirits, and they were all tempted to indulge themselves in sleep. Ah! what remissness and stupor do we perceive among real as well as nominal Christians! While death and judgment are thought to be at a distance, do we not sink down into a spiritual languor and supineness? Have not worldly cares and sensual gratifications a tendency to deprive our souls of their proper vigour and activity? We sleep when we ought to be awake, and, instead of waiting to meet our Lord, have need to be roused from our lethargy. That this should be the case with those who possess not the power of god-

liness, is no wonder. But it is strange indeed that true believers should fall into such a torpor: and yet few even of them preserve that heavenly frame of mind which consists in an habitual looking for the Saviour.

The approach of the bridegroom was at length announced. The solemn summons was proclaimed at midnight, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him." The virgins arose, and immediately endeavoured to put themselves in a state of readiness. And now the foolish discovered their own negligence and deficiency; but it was too late to find a remedy. Their lamps were entirely gone out. In vain they implored a supply of oil from the wise, who had no more than was absolutely necessary for themselves. In vain they attempted to purchase. The warning was too short; the bridegroom was at hand. They only, who were wise, were prepared to meet him, and admitted to partake of the marriage feast. "The door was shut," to the exclusion of all others: though the foolish earnestly solicited to be received, they were rejected with abhorrence.

How awful will be the notice of death and judgment! Must it not effectually rouse and awaken every soul of man? "The hypocrites in Zion" will be thrown into the utmost consternation and horror when they perceive their real state, and find that their former light of false profession and false hope is entirely extinguished, and that it will then profit them nothing. When they are about to be summoned to the bar of God, they may try, perhaps, to make preparation, and call on all around to help them. But in vain: their day of grace is expired, and no further mercy is to be obtained. They must be taken away as they are, nor can they be admitted into the heavenly kingdom, however they may "cry with a great and exceeding bitter cry." Alas! to what purpose had they maintained a profession of religion so long?

Their formal services, their cold and hypocritical attendance upon religious ordinances, will then appear utterly unavailing. No such petition as "Lord, Lord, open to us!" will be accepted: they are excluded for ever.

But those who have been "found in the faith" will be unspeakably blessed. They may be overtaken in a state of very culpable negligence; yet it is not the sleep of the insincere. Notwithstanding their failures and declensions, they preserve a supreme love to God, and an habitual union with Christ. They are, therefore, actually "ready," though they may be surprised in a frame of mind not so lively and spiritual as they ought at all times to possess. Upon the first intimations of their Lord's approach they may be perplexed; but they are safe: they shall enter with him into his kingdom, and sit down at his table. And "blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb\*"

Jesus has taught us to make a proper application of the parable. As we know not at what hour we shall be summoned to meet him, he enjoins us to maintain a constant vigilance, and to wait with unclosed eyelids the signals of his appearance. Let us seek for his pardoning and renewing grace, through the merit of his blood, and the influence of the Holy Ghost: and, being thus reconciled to God, "let us watch and be sober." If we expect the coming of our Lord, what have we to do with self-indulgence? O "let us not sleep as do others," nor be content merely to escape condemnation; but "give diligence, that an entrance may be ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ†."

He continued to warn his disciples of the last judgment, and by another parable urged the necessity of activity in his service, as, in that which we have just

<sup>\*</sup> Rev. xix. 9. + 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

considered, he had inculcated a holy watchfulness. One of a similar nature and tendency had been delivered before\*; but we need not be anxious to avoid

a repetition of instructions so important.

A person of rank and property is represented as departing to a distant country, and previously committing the care of his substance to his servants, that they may improve it for his use. He distributed his effects among them in shares of different value; to one five talents, to another two, and to another one, according to their respective ability. Thus, also, Jesus deals with his church. He is the great Lord and Proprietor of all; and, as every thing is derived from him, every thing should be employed with a view to his glory. He is gone into heaven; but those who are called by his name are required, in his absence, to manage his concerns. All our possessions, advantages, and opportunities, our natural capacities, and the gifts of Providence which we enjoy, are granted to us, not as our own absolute right, but as a tempotary trust. We are enjoined to turn them to the best account, to make them our commercial store, for the diffusion and interchange of blessings, that we may promote the honour of God, and the advancement of true religion. This, however, cannot be effected without without great exertions and unwearied assiduity.

What, then, was the conduct of these servants? The two, who had received most, improved, and even doubled their stock, by a diligent application: but the man to whom the one talent was committed, being secretly disaffected to his master, refused to make any use of it whatever. Our Lord meant not to intimate that those who are placed in the most eminent situations are most faithful and laborious in doing his work; for fact and experience often prove the contrary. But the representation was rather in-

<sup>\*</sup> Luke xix. 12-27. See Sect. 30.

tended to teach us, that they, who enjoy the fewest advantages, are accountable to him. Blessed be God, there are those in his church, who move in the highest and most enlarged sphere, with credit to their profession, and extensive benefit to others. They who are truly devoted to him, and live under the influence of his grace, cannot allow themselves in habitual indolence. Their heart's desire is to embrace every opportunity, and exert all their faculties, that they may render themselves of real use in their generation. Do we answer this description? Are there not many among us, who, with peculiar gifts, are doing nothing, or nothing to the purpose? And is it not disgraceful to be as drones, an incumbrance, instead of a blessing, to society? Or is no danger to be apprehended from such a conduct? Let us attend to the issue.

The servants were continued in their trust for a considerable time; but at length their master returned, and called them to a strict account. Thus, in due season, Jesus will be revealed from heaven, and it will be one great end of his appearance to reckon with us. Yes: he will demand of us, and it will be publicly declared, what has been our plan of life, in what manner we employed the deposit which he left under our care.

The diligent and faithful servants were distinguished by their lord's approbation, and received a large recompense. They represented, with humble gratitude, what he had enabled them to do. They owned his goodness, and gave him the praise. With kind condescension, he instantly applauded their fidelity, and rewarded their exertions with a proportionable share of preferment. Such will be the favourable acceptance which believers, who have lived not unto themselves, but unto Jesus their exalted Master, shall meet with from him at his final advent. They are indebted to him for their whole salvation,

and they will acknowledge their best obedience to be the fruit of his love. This, however, he determines to exhibit before the assembled universe, for his own honour, as well as for their happiness. He will declare himself well pleased in their upright and zealous endeavours to promote his glory, and assign them a portion of the felicities of his kingdom. It should also be remarked, as an instance and proof of his mercy, no less than of his righteousness, that he will approve in his people those very works, which they performed only by the influence of his Spirit; and that he will bestow upon them rewards adjusted to the various degrees of their faithfulness and assiduity.

What, then, became of the slothful servant? He seems to have flattered himself that he was safe, at least, if not worthy of commendation, because he had not squandered away the money committed to him. He presumed even to vindicate his conduct by the most injurious representations of his master, as requiring what was severe, unreasonable, unjust, or impossible. But his very pleas were urged against him, and formed the ground of his condemnation; for they showed his baseness, inconsistency, and malignant disposition towards his lord. He was, accordingly, turned out with disgrace from the trust which he had abused, and sentenced to a state of endless imprisonment and consummate wretchedness.

This is an awful description of the present character and final doom of those who are "idle and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Possibly they may have the most confident expectations of escaping punishment, because their behaviour is inoffensive; and they may not be undeceived till they are called to give up their accounts. But on that occasion no one will be excused merely because he has done no harm, even if such a pretence were true. It will be inquired how much real and

positive good has been effected. Do any dare to hope that the great difficulties of a religious life, for which their strength is unequal, will justify their indolence? They should be reminded, that, the more arduous their work appears, the more strenuous exertions are necessary, and that the weakness of which they complain is not to be charged upon God, as it is no other than their own extreme depravity, a confirmed hatred of God and holiness. Their notions that the obedience which God requires is unpleasant, impracticable, and a tyrannical imposition, are false, and evince a deep malignity of mind. These, therefore, will be produced against them to their entire confusion. Even on their own principles, their conduct should be far different: and, whatever they may talk of their inability, they will be condemned for their negligence. To be "slothful," in the language of the parable, is to be "wicked;" and those who are "unprofitable," that is, useless in their place and generation, shall be finally excluded from God and happiness, and consigned to everlasting torment and despair, where they may for ever bewail their folly, but must continue to feel its effects in a state of unutterable anguish.

The proper conclusion, then, is, that the present life is not a time for loitering. You must expect the return of your Lord to reckon with you; and, therefore, you must not only wait for him, but diligently apply to his work. It is not enough that you avoid gross and scandalous offences, or be harmless in society. If no fruits of righteousness are produced, no glory brought to God, no benefit accrue to his church, through your labours of faith and love, you must hear that tremendous sentence, "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping

and gnashing of teeth."

Jesus proceeded to enforce these awful admonitions in the most explicit terms, without the obscurity of a parable, describing his future advent, and the manaer in which the last judgment will be conducted. The passage, as it stands in the Evangelist, is singularly sublime and affecting. It sets before us a scene the most grand and interesting which can possibly be conceived. All in heaven and all on earth are convened together, (an immense and innumerable company!) while their Creator and their Governor, taking his seat upon a throne of glorious majesty, enters into a strict examination of every human character, and appoints to all the children of Adam their proper places, either in happiness or misery, for ever. We are here, then, obliged to consider ourselves before the great tribunal, in the midst of the assembled universe.

Every eye is fixed upon the person of the Judge. It is "the Son of man," who assumed our nature, and once dwelt among us in a state of profound humiliation. How different from the first is this his second advent! He comes with supreme authority, and displays the brightness and perfections of Deity. It is the time of his public manifestation, when the lignity and excellency of his character, which were obscured during his residence on the earth, are known and confessed by all. And are we not constrained, rom the very description before us, to own that Jesus s "the Lord of glory," "over all, God blessed for ver?" Considering the grandeur of his appearance, nd his illustrious retinue, attended as he is by all he holy angels; considering, too, the nature of his ffice, which implies that he possesses no less than omiscience and a sovereign power of determining the nal state of all mankind, and of closing the gates of eaven and hell for ever; we cannot hesitate to conlude that he is Jehovah. O, let us give him, what e is worthy to receive, our unfeigned and supreme everence, confidence, and love! Let "every knee ow at his name, and every tongue confess that Jesus hrist is Lord."

The whole human race are gathered together before him, and stand to take their trial at his bar. But his all-discerning eye separates them into two classes, according to their characters; and in this division the one need fear no mistake, nor the other presumptuously expect it. His faithful people, who have owned him as their Shepherd, and who were redeemed and defended by him as the sheep of his flock, are placed on his right hand; and on his left are all those who have continued in opposition to him, in the uncleanness of their natural corruption, and

who are therefore hateful in his sight.

With a solemnity and majesty, which no words can describe, he proceeds to pass the irrevocable sentence The King of glory speaks, declaring his affectionate regard for those on his right hand, as being dear to his Father, and distinguished by his grace. He welcomes them to his presence, and commands them to enter into the immediate possession of that inheritance which had been originally appointed for them in the divine counsels. Yet, as that is "the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God," he justified his favour to them, and proves undeniably the equity of his dispensations. To this end he produces to pub lic view the works of righteousness which they have performed through faith, and from love to his name Their acts of kindness, in relieving and comforting hi afflicted and oppressed people, he exhibits as an evi dence that they are the very persons to whom th promises are made. They themselves, it should seem would not presume to mention their best exertions in his service; these do not constitute the ground of their dependence. Nay, they express their wonder that he should speak in terms of such honourable re gard and approbation of their obedience and zeal which they had scarcely been conscious of, and knew to be unworthy of his notice. But he confirms th sentence, and graciously declares, that he accepts an recompenses what they have done for the meanest member of his church, as if it were done to himself.

In the mean time, the impenitent and unbelieving are filled with horror and dismay, waiting to receive their doom. The King omnipotent turns to them, and, to evince his holy indignation at the baseness of their conduct, bids them to depart from him, under the weight of his curse, into a state of endless torment. There they must be companions of those apostate spirits, the devil and his angels, with whom they were confederate in rebellion. Nor is this the decree of a merciless tyrant, but the appointment of a righteous Judge. Accordingly, he proceeds to bring forth the strongest evidence against them, and proves, from their disobedience, unbelief, and contempt of his name, that they deserve this heavy condemnation. Their neglect of those duties of mercy, which he indispensably requires as the fruits of faith and love. clearly manifests their character, and justifies his decision. Many of them in this life appear not to be sensible of their guilt, and even rise up in their own vindication: but if, at that day, they should presume to deny the charge, it will be substantiated from the unerring testimony of the King himself, to their entire confusion. He will convict them of falsehood and hypocrisy, in pretending a regard to him, when they have despised his poor members; and therefore he will declare that his sentence against them shall stand.

It remains only that the determination of the Judge be carried into effect. Accordingly, those who come under his condemnation are driven away from his presence, and consigned to that tremendous punishment, from which there can be no release: and those who are justified before him immediately receive the consummation of their bliss and glory, which will be durable as the existence of God himself.

This important description leads us to observe,

1. That good works will obtain an honourable notice at the last day. God forbid, therefore, that we should not now give them their proper consequence and attention. The inquiry at the tribunal of Christ, as here represented, will be instituted concerning the evidences of our faith. Our obedience will be produced to prove the sincerity of our religious professions, and the strength, as well as reality, of our principles. This testimony will be required, not for the information or satisfaction of the Judge, who is intimately acquainted with every case, and with the very secrets of all hearts, but for the exhibition of his own righteous character before the universe. We perceive, too, that a special regard will be paid to acts of Christian kindness and liberality. Much stress is laid upon love, as peculiarly pleasing to God: upon that love, which shows itself in vigorous exertions for the support and consolation of those who belong to the family of Christ. This, which is the necessary fruit of faith, maintains, in all its efforts, a continual respect to the Saviour; on which account it is honoured with so high a commendation. But this is essentially different from that vain indiscriminate generosity, which proceeds not from right motives, and which, though admired by the world, is offensive to God. We observe, also,

2. That the sins of unbelievers will be publicly declared in the day of judgment. We cannot be concealed from the piercing eye of God. Every instance of our misconduct is noted down in his book; and, if we do not now obtain remission through the blood of the cross, all will be produced against us at that solemn reckoning. No man will be condemned without evidence; and the evidence against sinners will be so strong and incontestable, as to silence their pleas, and confound them before their Judge. The habitual neglect of known duties, no less than the

actual commission of gross iniquity, will exclude us from heaven; since the former, as well as the latter, will prove the heart unsound. This is, indeed, a most alarming consideration; and yet it necessarily follows from our Lord's description. Those who are destitute of love, or not actuated by a supreme regard to Christ to lay themselves out for the benefit of his church, shall hear the tremendous sentence, "Depart from me, ye cursed."

What, then, is to be done? Let us be solicitous to obtain that faith, which "worketh by love." Let us pray to be united to Jesus, as living branches of the true vine; that we may be "filled with the fruits of righteousness," and "have boldness in the day of

judgment." Amen.

## JESUS CHRIST.

**SECT. 36.** 

Jesus celebrated the passover—washed his disciples' feet—instituted the eucharist—declared the treachery of Judas, and the approaching fall of Peter.

It was love which brought down the Saviour from heaven; a love which must astonish those who seriously contemplate its inexpressible dimensions; a love which is constant, immutable, and everlasting. This principle appeared to actuate him during the whole of his abode on earth; and, especially toward the close of his life, every minute circumstance was so ordered, as to show the strength and tenderness of his affection for the dear followers whom he had chosen to himself. He retained his little family about him, all of whom, except one, had been sincerely attached to him; and now, though he was about to depart from them, his kindness was undiminished: he continued most ardently desirous of promoting their happiness, even to the latest moment \*. We also may rejoice that He is "the Lord, who changeth not;" and that he has expressly declared to every believer, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.'

A general account is given us of the manner in which he spent the few days immediately preceding his death. He constantly attended the temple, where he taught the people with unwearied assiduity, and retired each evening to the mount of Olives, probably for the purposes of devotion †. On

<sup>.</sup> John xiii. 1.

Thuke xxi. 37, 98. Bethany lay at the foot of this mount, and perhaps our Lord spent some part of his evenings with his beloved friends in that town. See Sect. 32. Matt. xxi. 17.

the Tuesday, after delivering the instructions which we have considered, he warned his disciples that he should be betrayed and crucified at the approaching festival \*. Then, also, as it should seem, while the rulers were consulting how they might destroy him without raising a public commotion, Judas went and bargained with them for a paltry sum of money, the common price of a slave, treacherously to surrender up his Master into their hands.

Thursday in On the morning of Thursday, Jesus com-Passion week. manded two of his disciples to make the necessary preparations for celebrating the passover t. But, as they were destitute of a habitation of their own, where could they assemble together for the purpose? The difficulty was soon removed; and the manner of its removal proved that Jesus possessed a clear knowledge of all events, and exercised a full authority over every heart. He described to his chosen messengers the place and circumstances in which they should meet the servant of one, who would be immediately disposed to receive them into his house. There they provided the paschal lamb; and thither he repaired with the twelve, at the proper hour of the evening, for the observation of the holy solemnity. When they were set down together, he addressed them with peculiar tenderness, assuring them that he had felt an earnest desire to partake of that passover with them before he quitted the world. He then directed that they should divide the cup of wine among themselves (which was an usual ceremony at the beginning of the paschal supper), and declared that he would no more drink of the fruit of the vine till God should introduce his kingdom, and the object of that ordinance should be fulfilled.

The Jewish sacrament here mentioned exhibited

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xxvi. 1-5, 14-16. Mark xiv. 1, 2, 10, 11. Luke

<sup>†</sup> Matt. xxvi. 17-20. Mark xiv. 12-17. Luke xxii. 7-18.

in a typical manner some of the grand blessings of the Gospel. It was appointed to preserve a remembrance of the deliverance of the Israelites, when the destroying angel slew all the first-born of the Egyptians \*, and at the same time to represent the security which the true Israel shall receive through the shedding of the blood of Jesus. He is the end and substance of the ordinance; and for that very reason it was designed that he should be betrayed at the particular season, and on the very night, when the paschal lamb was killed, that he might more exactly answer to the type. "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast t," not the Jewish, but the Christian festival; and let us be solicitous that the blood of this Lamb of God may be sprinkled upon our hearts by faith; for without this we shall stand exposed to the "fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."

It is not easy, nor is it of consequence to our plan, to settle precisely the order of the various circumstances which occurred at the last supper. At that time probably, but in which part of the entertainment we do not determine, Jesus submitted to assume the habit and employment of a servant, and wash the feet of his disciples t. This transaction was conducted. not in a light and trifling manner, but with a serious solemnity; and we perceive an inexpressible grandeur as well as condescension in the Saviour's deportment. Knowing that Judas had formed the scheme of betraying him, and that his own departure was near, he was desirous of improving the few remaining hours in delivering all necessary instructions to his dear disciples. For this purpose, though conscious of his great dignity, as the supreme Almighty Lord, who came down from the throne of glory in the highest heavens, and was about to return thither, he deigned to exhibit a further instance of his deep humiliation. He rose up from supper, and put himself into the habit of a

<sup>\*</sup> Exod. xii. +1 Cor. v. 7, 8. # John xiii. 1-17.

menial servant, that he might minister to his poor followers; and He, who was Lord of all, stooped to the very lowest office, while with his own hands he washed their feet.

We cannot but wonder at his conduct, and ask what end it was designed to answer. It appears to have been a significant action, intended to represent the nature and efficacy of that grace by which he purifies his people from their natural pollution. This is his own explanation. When Peter objected the unsuitableness of his exalted Master's performing so mean a service for him, Jesus replied, that this, as well as his other dispensations, would be more clearly understood hereafter: and added, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." Are we, then, sensible of our great defilement? It is declared that "we are all as an unclean thing \*," "altogether become filthy †." Were this properly understood, it would produce in us a deep abhorrence of ourselves, and a cordial esteem for the Saviour, whose office it is to deliver us from corruption, and communicate spiritual purity. Then we should rejoice in that gracious promise, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ve shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from your idols will I cleanse you ‡." Then we should pray, as Peter, "Lord, wash not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." Those indeed, who are the faithful disciples of Jesus, are clean already, as he testified: but it is still necessary, even for them, to renew their application to him, that they may be freed from those pol-lutions which they are daily contracting.

The action was designed likewise as a lesson of humility to all his people. He had frequently inculcated poverty of spirit, self-denial, meekness, and lowliness of mind; and now, to confirm the instructions he had given, he stooped to this service. He therefore called upon the twelve to be consistent with their profes-

<sup>\*</sup> Isa. lxiv. 6. + Psal. liii: 3.

sions of regarding him as their Master and Lord, and to follow his example by a readiness to submit to mean and painful employments, for the benefit and comfort of others. He reminded them that a similar conduct would be no disparagement to them, who were only his attendants and messengers, and that their religious knowledge would be a blessing no

further than it produced a suitable practice.

The solemn admonition probably had a peculiar reference to the state of their minds. It was at that time when a strange and unseasonable contention had arisen among them about the chief preferment in the temporal dominion, which they still expected him to establish \*. This ambitious spirit, these carnal views and affections, he reproved. He argued, that though a fondness for power prevailed in the Gentile world. it was inconsistent with their character and engagements, who were required to show their eminence by condescension and meekness. He himself had appeared among them in the form of a servant. assured them that he did not forget their faithful and steadfast attachment through his various afflictions, and that he would recompense it by conducting them to a state of exaltation far superior to that which they had so eagerly desired. He solemnly promised them that they should partake of that bliss and glory which he was going to possess, that they should there enjoy the most intimate communion with him, and even sit, like his assessors in the judgment, with marks of peculiar dignity, approving and confirming the sentence which should be pronounced upon the twelve tribes of Israel.

We also, who follow the Saviour, should be instructed to look for our preferment in the world above. Being "faithful unto death," we shall receive "a crown of life." The meanest of his servants shall hereafter obtain "a kingdom which cannot be

<sup>\*</sup> Luke xxii. 24-30.

moved." A distinguished honour, doubtless, is reserved for the Apostles at the last day. Yet believers of a lower order may exult in the prospect of their future advancement. "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world\*?" Jesus himself hath declared, without respect to persons, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne †." But, for the present, this is our direction, "Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate ‡." We are forbidden to cherish ambition and avarice, envy and contention. We are strictly enjoined to forego our own interest, ease, and reputation, whenever we can thereby render ourselves more extensively useful in life. With this view we must frequently submit to such services as may seem to diminish our consequence, and require painful and laborious exertions. This will show that we imitate our great Exemplar; and those only can claim an interest in his promises who are willing to tread in his steps.

Where, then, shall we find those, who maintain the Christian character with consistency? Many there are, who compliment Jesus with the appellation of Lord and Master: but we ask, Do you possess the mind which was in Him? Is he the pattern which you propose to yourselves for the regulation of your own spirit and practice? Are you living under the habitual influence of humility? The appearance and the language you may easily assume; but does the disposition itself abide in you, and govern your conduct? What means that selfishness, that pride, and eagerness for advancement, which we so frequently discover under a religious profession? How unsuitable for you, who should be dead to the world, are all contentions about honour and precedency! Do not the various commotions, by which even the church itself is divided, prove that there is little of real Christianity among us, because there is little conformity to Christ? Why do you decline this or the

<sup>\* 1</sup> Cor. vi. 2. † Rev. iii. 21. ‡ Rom. xii, 16.

other office to which you are called? Possibly it may seem low and degrading in the estimation of men; it may be grating to corrupt nature, or it may obstruct your secular views. But, while you contemplate the Lord of glory washing the feet of his disciples, be ashamed of paying so much regard to your own convenience. Surely it is not beneath you to copy after him; and, to do this, you must be "as one that serveth."

Upon the same occasion, also, Jesus instituted the eucharist, probably before they rose from the table, since it is said to be done "as they were eating." While he fulfilled in himself the ancient passover, and abolished its observance, he embraced that opportunity to ordain a new sacrament, which succeeded to it, as baptism did to circumcision. This is a rite of peculiar importance under the Gospel dispensation; and it is not difficult to ascertain its nature and design, from the clear account which is given of its ori-

ginal appointment \*.

Jesus took bread, and, looking up with devout affections to God for his blessing, he divided it into several shares. He then distributed it among his disciples, commanding them to receive it as an emblem of his suffering body, and in commemoration of his death. In like manner, also, he delivered to them a cup of wine, which he directed them all to partake of, as a representation of his precious blood, whereby the new covenant is confirmed to us, and remission of sins obtained. He further declared that he should no more join with them in that solemnity upon earth, but that they should hereafter celebrate together the sacred mysteries therein exhibited.

Such was the institution: nor can we doubt that the observance of it is binding upon us, since an Apostle has taught us that hereby we are to "show the Lord's death TILL HE COMET." It is also ma-

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xxvi. 26.—30. Mark xiv. 22.—26. Luke xxii. 19, 20. † 1 Cor. xi. 26.

hifest, from the plain and simple description before us, for what purposes, and with what temper of mind, we should communicate in this divine ordinance. Jesus himself is the grand object which it is intended to display. He is set forth before us as our spiritual food and sustenance. Those visible elements, bread and wine, which afford peculiar nourishment to our bodies, very fitly represent Him, who alone can maintain the life and vigour of our souls. Yet, as he does this only in consequence of his sufferings, he is here proposed to our view as wounded, bleeding, dying, for us. His body, like the bread, was broken; his blood, like the wine, was poured out. Thus, we observe, by virtue of his sacrifice, "his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed \*."

The participation of this sacrament shows the necessity of receiving Christ by faith. The bread and wine must be taken before they can yield any nutriment: and "except we eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, we have no life in us †." Then especially, when we approach to his table, we should exercise a fixed and strong dependence upon him. Let us attend to his own injunction, "Do this in remembrance of me." Let us bear in mind the dignity of his person, the glory which he originally possessed, and the humiliation to which he stooped. We are to regard him, not only as a bright example, or a kind benefactor, but as our High-Priest, offering up himself as an atonement to God, to make reconciliation for us. Thus, while we remember the agonies which he endured, we should "look upon him whom we have pierced, and mourn for kim f." The recollection of his cross will constrain us to "abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes."

Yet, as a holy festival, it affords a proper occasion for the exercise of lively joy. What can be so calculated to revive and gladden the heart as the view of

<sup>\*</sup> John vi, 55. + vi. 53. # Zech. xii. 10.

those inestimable benefits which are here exhibited? What can tend more to inspire us with hope, confidence, love, and zeal? Nay, it is the appointed method in which God is pleased to strengthen, quicken, and comfort his people; and as our wants return upon us, so, by a frequent attendance on this ordinance, we should seek fresh communications of grace. We are encouraged to expect his presence and blessing, and thus are enabled to maintain a freedom of intercourse with him. Such an attendance, also, will be the means of uniting us together in the bonds of Christian fellowship, and of rendering us "kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love." What a source of happiness is this! Yet does not the general neglect of the Lord's table prove that the Saviour has but a small share in our remembrances?

We do not invite sinners who are living in ignorance and contempt of God. We warn them not to profane the solemnity by their formality and irreverence. If you feel not your need of Jesus, nor desire to please him, insult him not by presuming to "eat of his bread, and to drink of the wine which he hath mingled." But you, who are bowed down with a sense of guilt and depravity, who earnestly wish to accept salvation on the terms of the Gospel, may approach with humble hope. Only devote your souls and your all to Jesus, and bind yourselves by a vow to serve him with all your faculties, to the last moment of your lives, and here you may expect to receive the tokens of his love, and the gracious supplies of his spirit.

Judas was present when our Lord declared in the strongest terms his high regard for his disciples; and it is probable that even the traitor himself participated of the holy eucharist. But, though he had acted his part in so subtle a manner as not to be suspected by the other Apostles, neither his character nor his designs were concealed from Jesus. At length it ap-

peared expedient that the rest also should be apprized of the diabolical plan of treachery, then ripe for execution. While, therefore, they were all at table together, the Saviour intimated his perfect knowledge of it: and this he did, that his chosen followers might not be staggered when they should see one from among themselves so scandalously desert his post, but be confirmed in the faith, by observing a completion of the Scriptures in that event. He exhorted them, also, to persevere in their zealous exertions for his cause, assuring them that both he and his Father world \*.

In the view of this sad case Jesus felt a keen anguish of spirit. He then declared more explicitly, "One of you shall betray me;" "the hand of the traitor is with me on the table;" and by certain express tokens he marked out Judas as the man, denouncing the most tremendous wo against him, though he should be the instrument of fulfilling the divine counsels. An awful consternation seized the company, and every one, suspecting himself rather than Judas, cried out, "Lord, is it I?" But that monster of iniquity remained unaffected by the solemn warning. We might have supposed that he would have been deterred from his purpose: but he was the more enraged, and went out immediately, under a violent instigation of the devil, in the darkness of the night, to accomplish his infernal scheme.

Our Lord then exulted in the prospect of those blessed consequences, which would result from the treachery of Judas, as the means of completing the grand work of redemption †. He reminded his disciples that the hour was approaching when he himself should enter on a state of high exaltation, and bring

John xiii. 18—30. Matt. xxvi. 21—25. Mark xiv. 18—21.
 Luke xxï. 21—23.

<sup>+</sup> John xiii, 31. &c. Luke xxii. 31-38.

glory to God in saving sinners by his death. Looking upon his dear followers with a tenderness of affection, like an indulgent father upon his little children, from whom he was on the point of being separated, he pressed it upon them, as his dving request, that they would continue firmly and warmly attached to one another. This he enjoined as a new command, not unknown, indeed, in former dispensations. but now enforced by fresh motives, and by an example altogether singular in its kind: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." His love to us, then, is to be the cause, the measure. and the pattern, of our kindness and regard to all the members of his church. He recommended, also, this reciprocal cordial affection, as the strongest proof of our union with him, and the most honourable badge of our profession.

If we understand the full import of our Lord's de-claration, "I have loved you," its influence will be irresistible. We shall not only abhor the treachery of Judas, but dread the thought of displeasing Him, who has shown such compassion and favour toward Let us examine our religion on this ground: Do we scrupulously avoid all those practices and tempers which he condemns, and endeavour to express our gratitude by our diligence and fervour in his service? Do we cultivate that principle, on which he has laid such peculiar stress, unfeigned love to his people for his sake? How excellent would be the fruits of this disposition! What peace and happiness would it produce; and how strongly would it recommend our system of faith! But we are all lamentably defective in this grace. Do not our peevishness, envy, and contention, our censoriousness, bigotry. and resentment, disgrace our profession, and betray our insincerity? Surely it cannot now be said, as it was of the primitive church, "See how these Christians love one another."

Jesus had intimated his approaching departure; on which Peter, though admonished that he could not follow him for the present, declared his readiness to attend him through all dangers, even to death itself. Alas! little do we know how we shall be able to stand in the hour of trial. The boasting Apostle was reproved, and informed that before the morning light his strong confidence should be so shaken, that he would deny in the most shameful manner all connexion and acquaintance with his Lord and Master. That very night, he was told, would be a time of peculiar temptation, as Satan was desirous to practise his wiles upon them all. He was assured that his principles would be severely assaulted, and his soul preserved from total apostacy only through the gracious intercession of the Saviour. He was further charged to confirm the faith of his weak brethren, after his own recovery.

Such was the solemn caution given to Peter: Jesus also subjoined an affecting address to the whole company. He bade them prepare for a sore conflict, and arm themselves for the fight. They had been, till then, abundantly supplied with necessary provisions when they went out to preach the Gospel. But he reminded them that they would soon be so entirely destitute as to stand in need of a purse furnished with money, a scrip with food, and a sword for their defence. He informed them further, that. as all the ancient prophecies concerning him should be exactly fulfilled, so in particular, agreeably to Isaiah's declaration, he was about to be "numbered with the transgressors," and to die as a malefactor \*. Probably they misunderstood him, as if he wished them to resist their enemies with violence. He intended only to lead their minds to the expectation of a severe opposition; and they ought to have known that "the weapons of their warfare were not carnal †."

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<sup>\*</sup> Isa. liii. 12. + 2 Cor. x. 4.

But, leaving for the present the case of the Apostles, let us remember for ourselves, that we also are required to "endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ \*." Let us be solicitous to maintain his cause, which, as a sacred deposit intrusted to us, must be kept at the hazard of our dearest temporal interests. We should look for a fierce onset, and be prepared to make a vigorous defence. But the cautions now before us will teach us not to depend on our own resolution and ability; for, if we be selfconfident, we shall, probably, fall like Peter, and taste the bitter punishment of pride. Then be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."-"Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand t."

We see our calling; we must follow the Saviour not to worldly honour and preferment, but to shame, contempt, and many secular disadvantages. Are we willing to hazard all consequences in his service? Let us boldly declare ourselves on his side, and entreat him so to pray for us, while Satan is sifting us as wheat, that our faith may not fail. Let us attend him to the cross, and then we shall participate of his glory. Whatever dangers may threaten, or enemies assault us, may each of us be able to say, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy!" Amen.

y 4. Zimen.

<sup>• 2</sup> Tim. ii. 3. + Eph. vi. 10, 13. # Acts xx. 24.

## JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 37.

Josus, before he quitted the guest-chamber, exhorted and comforted his Apostles—represented himself as the true Vine—enforced obedience and mutual love—and predicted persecution.

THE solemn celebration of the last passover could not but make a deep impression on the minds of the disciples; and the warnings then addressed to them probably excited much perplexity. Their beloved Master had declared that he should very soon be separated from them by the hand of violence, his death be accomplished through the treachery of one in their own company, and they themselves exposed to a severe assault both from men and Satan. moval of their Lord, so justly dear to them, was in itself a distressing circumstance: and foreseeing further dangers and difficulties, when deprived of their Head, they felt increasing anguish, and were oppressed with painful apprehensions. Jesus was sensibly affected for them, and, as it should seem, more solicitous on their account than his own. Before, therefore, they retired from the guest-chamber, he renewed his exhortations, with a view to alleviate their sorrows, and inspire them with hope, confidence, and joy \*.

How tender and compassionate does the Saviour appear, while instructing and comforting his mourning disciples, "as a father does his children!" How exactly calculated to revive their spirits were the considerations here suggested! The benefit of these

<sup>\*</sup> John xiv. I, &c.

his last solemn addresses was designed to reach likewise even unto us. How many things do we meet with which have a tendency to cause grief, confusion, and terror! Observing in what a world of sin and disorder we are placed, what calamities frequently occur in human life, and how depraved and helpless we ourselves are, we shall, probably, be disposed to indulge a timorous and dejected frame of mind. What, then, is to be done? What can support and animate our souls, when dangers and distresses threaten us on every side? Let us hear the Saviour's words, and learn to apply them to our own case.

Thus he spoke:-" Endeavour to lay aside your anxieties and fears, and show the excellence of your religious principles by your composure and courage. You must, therefore, not only possess a due regard to God as the Maker, Preserver, and Governor of the world, but also fix your attention and reliance upon Me, as the Mediator, through whom alone you can entertain any solid hope of the divine favour, any just expectation of being safely conducted to the heavenly state. In that glorious abode, where my Father displays the lustre of his majesty, are sufficient accommodations for the whole church, numerous as it is; and there you will not be disappointed of a peaceable habitation. If this had not been infallibly secure, I would not have encouraged or permitted you to look for it. I am going to that kingdom on your behalf, to prepare the way for your admission: and, as I shall enter upon the possession in your name, I will not be unmindful of you, but return for the express purpose of receiving you to my own immediate presence, that you may dwell for ever near me, in that blissful inheritance, where even now I already am. After such clear declarations, you cannot mistake the place of which I speak, or the road which will lead you to it."

Thomas, probably understanding him as intending to erect a temporal dominion in some particular spot, desired further information. Jesus replied, "I myself have opened an access for sinners unto God; in me the divine promises and engagements are sure and immutable; through me eternal life is secured: nor can any one, whatever be his pleas or attainments, approach to the Father, but by means of my mediation. If, therefore, you had known my character and offices, you could not have been ignorant of Him: but now I have revealed him to you, and in me you behold the express image of his person\*."

Philip professed an ardent desire to be favoured with an outward manifestation of the Father's glory. On this our Lord reproved him for not having better understood the nature and dignity of the Master, with whom he had been so long conversant; and then declared, "In seeing me, you have in effect seen the Father. Do you not credit my solemn assertions, that I am one with him? My words demand your regard, as proceeding from Him; but, if these be rejected, the miraculous operations which I perform by virtue of my union with Him prove incontestably

the mysterious truth which I affirm."

Let us weigh the important doctrines here advanced. The question proposed to Philip may furnish a reproof to each of us, "Hast thou not known me?" Considering the information we have had, may we not justly be ashamed that we have not better learned the principles of our religion? Have we properly understood who the Saviour is, and what the purposes for which he came into the world? Have we beheld the glory of the Father so displayed in the person of the Son as to be convinced that their nature and perfections are the same? And is not this a firm foundation for our hopes, a source of strong consolation? For do we not now perceive that our

concerns may be safely intrusted in the hands of Jesus?

But have we indeed approached unto God, through the mediation of Christ? Or shall we presume to draw near to him in any other way? Who shall open the kingdom of heaven for us? Shall we plead our own obedience, as if this would procure us admission? The door would be barred against us; nor can any entrance be obtained but through the sacrifice and intercession of Him, who has returned to those blissful mansions from which he came down. He is gone to prepare a place, not for his Apostles only, but for all who believe in his name. You, therefore, who have fixed your whole dependence upon him, are encouraged to rejoice in his exalted dignity, and the certainty of final salvation. It is your privilege, though you are now despised and afflicted, to look forward with exultation "to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you \*." For vet a little while, and He, in whom you trust, shall appear in his glory, and take you up with great triumph to his beatific presence, where you shall admire, and love, and praise Him for ever.

The Saviour proceeded to comfort his disciples: "Distressed as you may be at my departure, I solemnly assure you that in consequence thereof you will obtain peculiar advantages. By virtue of my intercession, while you exercise a firm dependence upon me, you shall be enabled to perform miraculous operations, equal or superior to those which I myself have wrought †. Nor is this too much for you to

<sup>\* 1</sup> Pet. i. 4

<sup>+</sup> The Apostles not only expelled demons, healed the sick, raised the dead, as Jesus had done, but dispensed spiritual gifts to immense numbers, spake various languages, which they had never learned, and preached the Gospel with a success amazingly rapid and extensive. These were, in some sense, more illustrious effects than attended the ministry of our Lord: and yet this consideration does

expect: only present your supplications to God in faith, and, by the energy of my own power, I will bestow the blessings which you ask, that the glory of the Father may be displayed in the mediation of the Son."

We, also, may rejoice, that Jesus, who is gone into heaven, continues mindful of his church on earth, and is incessantly pouring down his benefits upon it. We should be thankful for those extraordinary communications vouchsafed to the Apostles, whereby the Gospel was first propagated, and confirmed with unquestionable evidence. Let us likewise be encouraged, by the prevalency of the intercession of our exalted High-Priest, to offer up our requests with humble boldness; for the promise reaches even unto us, "If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it." Ah! why are we so backward to pray, as if we had no Advocate with the Father, or as if this Advocate had no merit to plead, possessed no influence, and could exert no power, on our behalf? Let us not so dishonour him, but crediting his declarations, let us surround the throne of grace with our importunate petitions, and spread our wants before him. He is able, and he is equally willing, to supply all our necessities.

It is probable that the Apostles expressed a peculiar warmth of affection for their dear Lord, who was about to be taken from them, and that with a reference to their professions of regard he thus continued his discourse: "Let your love appear in your uni-

not weaken the argument for his divinity taken from his works, but rather strengthens it; for these very things were accomplished, as appears in the passage before us, by the power of the Saviour: and accordingly, the Apostles, in the miracles which they performed, confessed their dependence upon him, and ascribed the whole glory to him. They could not speak as he did, "I say unto thee, Arise," but "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk;" and again, "Jesus Christ maketh thee whole." Luke vii. 14. viii. 54. Acts iii. 6, ix. 34.

form obedience to my injunctions; and, though I shall withdraw from you, I will entreat the Father that you may enjoy the consolations of his Spirit, and that for ever. The men of the world, with such carnal sentiments and dispositions as predominate in their minds, cannot admit this divine Visitant; but you are already acquainted with his influences, and shall receive more abundant communications from him. I will not, therefore, totally and finally desert you, but will return to you in the power of the Holy Ghost. My bodily presence will be soon removed from the earth, but, through faith, you may still behold me ever near you; and as I am possessed of endless life, so, by virtue of your union with me, you shall maintain a state of spiritual vigour, and be conducted to the everlasting felicities of heaven. That promised effusion of the Spirit will convince you more fully that I am joined not only to my Father, but to yourselves also, by an indissoluble bond. You must be reminded, however, that he only, who shows a constant desire and endeavour to perform whatever I have commanded, is acknowledged to give a decisive proof of his regard. He is the person who shall obtain unequivocal marks of my Father's favour, as well as of my warmest attachment, and who, likewise, shall receive from me a clear discovery of my glorious character."

Judas, one of the twelve, but not the traitor, expressed his astonishment that such a discovery should be designed for them, and not extended to the world at large. He inquired how it could be; when Jesus immediately resumed his affectionate address: "The man who is influenced by a sincere love to me will necessarily yield an unfeigned submission to my authority; and, as he will be the object of my Father's complacency and delight, we will together visit him, and take up our residence within him. An enmity of heart, indeed, would lead to an entire rejection of my

words: but, as I declare the will of Jehovah, the God of hosts, every contemptuous unbeliever will be left without excuse. Such are the instructions which I have delivered during my personal ministry among you. And now, though I am departing, the Holy Ghost shall be sent to supply my place: he shall give you a clear conception of divine truth, and rerevive in your memories every doctrine which you have heard from me.

"Here, then, I take my leave, with a declaration of mybest wishes for you. Peace, the most valuable blessing, I bequeath to you: peace, which I have procured by my blood, and which can be communicated only by my grace, I bestow upon you. This is what the world cannot impart: their professions of good will are, in general, empty flatteries and compliments; they confer no real satisfaction, and are extremely changeable. Far different is my solemn benediction, which I pronounce in the sincerity of my heart, which carries an efficacy with it to promote your happiness, and which I will never revoke. On these grounds your fears may be dispersed, and

your minds composed and comforted.

"You will, therefore, receive the most ample benefits from my departure; and on my account, as
well as your own, you may be glad at my removal,
since I am quitting my present state of humiliation
and distress, and returning to my Father, who is
exalted in bliss and glory, far beyond what I possess
in this life. I have warned you of the events which
are about to take place, that you may not be staggered
by them, but rather confirmed in the faith. I shall
not have time to add much more; for I am just entering upon a painful conflict with Satan, who has
usurped the dominion of the world. But I dread
not his malice, as there is nothing in my nature
which can favour his assaults, or give him an advantage over me. I submit to this opposition, that I

may publicly testify my regard to the Father, and my readiness to fulfil all my engagements with him: and now I hasten to do my last work upon earth."

And what do we learn from this affecting discourse? Does it not excite in us the most fervent love to the Saviour? Let us not forget that he requires obedience as the test of our love. Do we not perceive the excellence and happiness of his service? Do we not long for the manifestation of the divine favour, which he promises to his faithful people? Surely it ought to afford us the strongest consolation that Jesus, who was dead, is alive again, and that he is gone into heaven, to carry on his designs of mercy for us. Nay, he is still ever present with his church, and pledges himself for the security of every true believer. The light, and strength, and joy of his Spirit, are vouchsafed to all his sincere disciples, even to the end of time: the Comforter will "abide with us for ever." Let us plead with him these gracious declarations: let us implore that peace, which is his own most valuable legacy; and request, that, since he hath overcome Satan, he would enable us to sustain the conflict, and bring us off "more than conquerors," to the praise of his great name.

After the solemn address which we have considered our Lord proposed to retire; but, probably making a pause before he quitted the room, he renewed his exhortations to the Apostles. To show them the necessity of continual dependence on him, he represented himself and his church under the similitude of a vine, planted and cultivated by a wise and careful husbandman\*. He is the root and stock of the tree, and his professing people are its branches. Some, which are beautifully adorned with leaves, produce no fruit. These are cut off, and consigned to the flames, as fit only to be used for fuel. Such is the state and character of merely nominal Chris-

<sup>\*</sup> John xv. 1, &c.

tians, and such will be their final destruction. They are members of the visible church; their appearances are fair and promising, but their barrenness witnesses against them; and therefore they are "nigh unto

cursing, whose end is to be burned \*."

There are, however, branches of another sort, truly excellent and valuable, which, in consequence of nourishment derived from the root, bear a large increase. Such, our Lord testified, were all the Apostles, after Judas had withdrawn from the company. Such, likewise, are all true believers: by faith they are joined to the Saviour, and from that union they receive an influence, which renders them, though in different degrees, "fruitful in every good work." To Him, therefore, all their attainments and usefulness are ascribed: left to themselves, or separated from him, they are no more productive of good than the branches of the vine when cut off from the stock. But, whilst they maintain a constant regard to Jesus, they preserve their spiritual life, and make advancement in holiness.

Yet even these valuable branches stand in need of being pruned; for, unless the luxuriant parts be taken off, the fruit will degenerate. For this very purpose, therefore, the care of the husbandman is exercised. O, what sharp operations does it require to lop off those excrescences, which shoot forth even from eminent believers! The Lord, who loves them, will not spare them, but appoint the heaviest afflictions, with no other design than to render them more pure, and, of consequence, more honourable

and useful members of his church.

Do we perceive our own character exhibited in this parable? Have we any thing more than an external profession of Christianity? Are we "filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God †?" Or

<sup>\*</sup> Heb. vi. 8. + Phil. i. 11.

how do we expect to do good? Is there any other way than through a vital union with the Saviour? No: he himself declared our utter inability when he said, "Without me ye can do nothing." Let us confess our weakness, and implore his help. May he attach our hearts to himself, and communicate such supplies of grace as may enable us to adorn our holy calling! Be it our concern to maintain our faith, and cultivate an intercourse with him day by day. Yet, even then, severe trials may be necessary for us. Let us not shrink from them, but pray only that they may accomplish in us the desired effects. How blessed will be the consequences of such an adherence to Christ! We shall be emboldened to approach him with confidence; for he has engaged to answer our petitions. By our consistent and honourable deportment the God whom we serve will be glorified, since it will appear from us not only that he is "rich in mercy," but that he "loveth righteousness." This also will contribute essentially to our own comfort, as affording the strongest evidence that we are the disciples of Jesus.

Our Lord, therefore, earnestly pressed upon his Apostles such a practical regard to duty: "As I am the object of my Father's complacency and delight, so do I feel the most affectionate attachment to you. It should be your aim and endeavour to walk in a state of holy intimacy with me; which can be effected only by your ready compliance with all my injunctions, even as I have yielded a constant and universal obedience to the injunctions of my Father. In these exhortations I am the more urgent, that I may receive continual satisfaction from you, and that

your happiness in me may be completed.

"One commandment, in particular, I again enforce upon you; which is that you bear the most ferrent love one towards another. In this you have only to imitate that kindness which I have shown

to you. No higher instance of benevolence can be produced than a man's offering up himself to die on behalf of his friends. As my friends I shall regard you while you pay a due deference to my authority, and obey my precepts. I treat you not as inferior domestics, who are to be kept at a distance, but as the partners of my counsels, to whom I-have communicated whatever I have received in charge from my Father. To this honourable situation you have been called, not by your previous choice of me; but by my free and sovereign mercy towards you: and I have appointed you to your sacred function, that you may be extensively useful, and that the benefits of your ministry may reach through many generations. Such also are my gracious engagements with you, that you may expect an answer to your largest petitions in my name. I require only that you show your gratitude and obedience by maintaining a mutual and ardent affection for one another."

And is it of no concern to us what the Saviour pressed upon his Apostles? Were they strictly enjoined to continue in the love of their Master; and are we at liberty to neglect and despise him? Should not his unparalleled kindness in dying for us, as well as for them, excite us to admire, and praise, and serve him? We had deserved the divine indignation and wrath: but, by virtue of his oblation, we may now be admitted to the most honourable privileges. We also, like the Apostles, are received into a state of holy friendship with our Lord, if, indeed, we believe in his name; and to us he condescends to make known the mysteries of his kingdom. Surely we shall not hesitate to say, The Lord hath done it, not for our righteousness, but of his own abundant grace. Yet we should remember that the end of our election and separation from the world is, that we may produce the fruits of righteousness. Is this our aim and desire? To instance in the particular duty so

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much insisted on, do we possess and cultivate brotherly love? If otherwise, where is our religion; where our knowledge and imitation of Christ? Can it be allowable for us, any more than for the first Christians, to "bite and devour one another?" You, therefore, who "have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth \*," for you

are strangers to the power of the Gospel.

Jesus proceeded in his exhortation to his Apostles, that he might prepare them for the opposition which awaited them: "However unexceptionable and benevolent your spirit and conduct may be, you need not wonder if you be marked out as objects of general detestation, since you have seen me treated in the same manner. If, indeed, you were conformed to the principles and practices of the world, you might conciliate their favour; but, as you differ from them so widely, in consequence of your being separated by my grace, you will excite their disgust. Still you should not complain, but be satisfied when you recollect that you meet with no worse reception than your great Master did. Persecutions will be raised against you on my account, through an ignorance of God and of his Christ. Be not tempted to comply with your enemies, or envy them their triumph; for their case is deplorably wretched. As I have so long preached amongst them, and confirmed my doctrines with unparalleled miracles, they can set up no plea in their own defence. For now it appears, that, in rejecting me, they resist the God of heaven, who hath borne his testimony to me. Yet, even by this unreasonable and base opposition, they fulfil their own Scriptures, which have foretold it †."

"My cause, however, shall prosper, notwithstanding the violence of adversaries. The abundant effusion of the Spirit, whom I will send down from the Father, upon my return to him, shall afford the most

<sup>\*</sup> James iii. 14.

<sup>†</sup> Psal. xxxv. 19.

convincing evidence of the truth of the Gospel. You also, my chosen witnesses, whom I have trained up for the ministry, shall be so strengthened and emboldened to preach the faith, that your enemies will be confounded, and multitudes of converts added to

my church."

What inference, then, do we draw from this part of the exhortation? If the religion of Jesus be the same as in primitive times, may not similar consequences be expected? The external profession, indeed, as it is general among us, exposes no man to contempt; but the life and power of it would still render us unfashionable, and offensive to these who are governed by the maxims and customs of the world. This is not to be avoided even by the most prudent and exemplary Christians. The zealous followers of Jesus will be hated, in a measure, as he was, and for that very reason, because they resemble Him. Does this discourage us? Or do we complain of the terms? Are we, then, inclined to join the society of those who scoff at all serious attention to spiritual things, or, at least, who care not for them? Let us deliberate well. What will the issue be? Would not such a conduct imply a decided opposition to the Saviour? And, considering the instructions and admonitions given us, would not our sin be unpardonable? Let us rather, therefore, meet the frowns of men, than provoke the vengeance of Almighty God.

The promulgation of the Gospel, through the effusion of the Holy Ghost and the labours of the Apostles, has been answerable to the prediction. But are we ourselves brought under its influence? Every true disciple, even now, will be able to bear witness for Christ: what, then, is our testimony concerning him? Can we tell of his power, faithfulness, and love, from our own experience, and recommend his service to all, from what we have known of its blessedness?

Attestations of this nature, from private and obscure Christians, might have the happiest effects in silencing the objections of infidels, and reconciling many to the principles which they despise. May Jesus, our exalted Lord, send down a more abundant measure of his Spirit upon us, that his cause may be revived, his church enlarged, and his people animated with increasing confidence and joy in his ways, to the glory of his own name here and hereafter to all eternity!

## JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 38.

Jesus concluded his address to his Apostles with a prediction of their sufferings, a promise of the Spirit, and an assurance of his own return—offered up a fervent prayer for himself, his Aposties, and all believers.

WHATEVER the Saviour felt on his own account, in the view of his approaching sufferings, he was most deeply affected, as we have seen, for the distressed state in which he was about to leave his beloved Apostles. The paschal supper, of which they had been partakers together, was the last meal in which they were to enjoy the communion of the same table before his death, and afforded the last opportunity for exhortation and counsel. A farewell at the moment of final separation is always attended, where the bonds of union in life have been dear and sacred, with peculiar circumstances of solemnity, tenderness, and grief. It was now that the love of the Saviour broke forth, resembling that which a parent expresses for his children, who are soon to be exposed as helpless orphans to extreme calamities and dangers. He proceeded, like such a counsellor, to instruct, warn, and comfort them \*.

"I have given you, my faithful followers, previous intimations of the formidable opposition which you will have to encounter, in order that, being prepared, you may not be shaken in your minds, or induced to desert my cause, when you enter upon the sharp conflict. Your enemies will persecute you with a rage

so blind and furious, that, while they excommunicate you, and even put you to death, they will consider themselves as performing a religious service, and bringing glory to God. This will arise from their ignorance of the righteous character of my Father, as well as of my peculiar office and dignity. In your deep distresses you will recollect my predictions, and find in them a confirmation of your faith. It was the less necessary to give you these notices before, as I have hitherto been your constant companion, ready to suggest all proper counsel and

direction, as circumstances occurred."

Such was the prophecy of Jesus, and we learn from the history of the Apostles that it was exactly verified. They who ought to have been received "as an angel of God" met with general scorn and detestation, as if they were unworthy to live; and many of them suffered death in its most dreadful forms, while their persecutors pleaded a regard to conscience and religion. We read of similar events in other ages of the church; and at the present day, though violence is restrained, and loud professions of candour and liberality are made, it is obvious that fervent zeal for the honour of our Redeemer would expose us to contempt. And do not many among us, through the fear of difficulties, decline those pious exertions, which we acknowledge to be requisite? Or, if we "suffer for righteousness' sake," are we not offended, and almost induced to desert the service? Have we, then, forgotten the declarations of Jesus? Or have they not taught us to expect the enmity of the world, if we would be the friends of God? If real godliness produced no opposition, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled? But matter of fact abundantly confirms their truth, and should establish. us in the belief and love of the Gospel.

The Apostles were too much oppressed by the intimations of their Lord's departure to propose any further inquiries upon the subject. But he proceeded to suggest such considerations as might relieve and comfort them. "However painful my removal may be to you, it is highly requisite on your own account; for you could not otherwise obtain the influences of the Holy Ghost. But now, in consequence of my death, this divine Agent shall descend upon you, and give an amazing efficacy to your ministrations. By his mighty operations the world will be convinced of the guilt which consists in unbelief and rejection of me. He will teach men the nature and sufficiency of my righteousness, from my return to my Father at the completion of my work, and in the overthrow and dethronement of Satan exhibit a proof of the judgment with which I am intrusted.

"Many things yet remain to be more clearly unfolded to you; but for the present, through the erroneous sentiments and strong prejudices which possess your minds, you are indisposed to receive them. The Spirit, who will be your Guide and Teacher, will effectually dispel the darkness from your minds, and reveal the whole system of divine truth: and his declarations should be regarded as coming with authority from Heaven. He will discover future events; but his peculiar office will be to give you clearer and more honourable conceptions of my character and salvation, by exhibiting to your view those glorious perfections, which I possess in the same extent as the Father."

Here let us pause, and contemplate the Saviour's promises, from which we may derive the strongest consolation. However we may be inclined to lament his removal from the earth, we may rejoice in those inestimable benefits which his death has procured. In particular, the influences of the Spirit are bestowed upon the church, as the fruit and purchase of his sacrifice. It is allowed that these influences

were communicated to the Apostles in an extraordinary measure, and the peculiar circumstances of their situation rendered them expedient. But the Spirit vet continues to execute his office by his common operations, according to our Lord's description. He it is who arrests the careless sinner, and fixes upon him a deep conviction of guilt, especially for his contempt of the grace of the Gospel. He gives the knowledge of salvation, by exhibiting to the view of the mind the perfect obedience of Christ. And he also directs the attention to the same exalted Personage, in the character of the Almighty Governor and universal Judge. May these effects accompany the labours of faithful ministers in the present day! For thus only "the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword \*:" thus only will it "have free course, and be glorified t."

It was promised to the Apostles that their ignorance and prejudice should be removed by further degrees of illumination, particularly by larger discoveries of the dignity of the Redeemer, and of the blessings which he bestows. We also stand in need of, and are encouraged to solicit and expect, the same gracious assistance. Have we no mistakes to be corrected, no wrong affections to be subdued? Let us pray that the Holy Ghost, who is the Author of all spiritual light and life, may "guide us into all truth." We look not for infallibility, or the gift of prophecy: but we may offer up the most fervent supplications. "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of our understanding being enlightened; that we may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints ‡."

<sup>\*</sup> Heb. iv. 12. + 2 Thoss ii. 1. # Eph. i. 17, 18.

Upon our Lord's intimating to his Apostles that he hould soon depart and go to the Father, and return fter a short interval, they were at a loss to comorehend his meaning. He declared, therefore, more xplicitly, that though distress and anguish were oming upon them, sharp as the pangs of childbirth, et as these are succeeded by sensations of peculiar lelight after a safe delivery, so their grief should be bllowed by a state of lasting joy, inasmuch as he would visit them again. Doubtless he intended to suggest, that by his appearance, upon his resurrection from the dead, he would disperse their fears, stablish their hopes and comforts, and render them launtless under future trials. Yet it is probable that he had a reference to his final advent, when all his people shall behold his glory. Then, in the highest sense of the words, they shall meet him "with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away \*." What strong consolation does this administer to believers! Under your severest calamities look forwards to your Lord's return with holy exultation, for "He shall wipe away all tears from your eyes †." If he should thus intimate his intention, "Surely, I come quickly;" it is your privilege to reply, "Amen: even so come, Lord Jesus t."

The Saviour reminded his Apostles, that, though his bodily presence should be withdrawn from them, they should be so much more enlightened as not to stand in need of the same familiar converse with him. Some degree of obscurity rested upon his instructions during his personal continuance among them; but he promised to give them by his Spirit the most explicit declarations of the divine will. He pressed upon them the necessity of prayer, and taught them especially to maintain an entire dependence upon his

<sup>\*</sup> Isa. xxxv. 10. + Rev. vii. 17. # xxii. 20.

merits and mediation, in all their addresses to the Father, which they had not till that time been instructed to do in so express a manner. He added, likewise, the most gracious assurances, that their petitions, being offered up through faith in his name, would certainly obtain a favourable acceptance, and ensure the completion of their wishes. This efficacy he taught them to ascribe, not only to his intercession, but to the strong affection which the Father himself bore towards them for their warm and faithful attachment to him. He repeated it, therefore, for their encouragement, that he was then about to return to that high and glorious Personage, whose love for them was the same as his own.

The clear and precious discoveries, which the Saviour promised, the Apostles actually received; and we, at this very day, enjoy the benefits of their illumination. Let us value those authentic records, in which they have unfolded to our view the revelation of divine truth, so wonderfully communicated to them. But let us not forget our need of prayer, and the great advantages attending the right performance of this duty. We, also, are allowed a free access to God in the name of Jesus. Are we making use o the privilege? Are we imploring spiritual blessing with all that fervour which a full conviction of their value would produce? Do we exercise an unfeigned reliance upon out exalted Intercessor? And car we, through him, approach to God, as to a loving Father, with confidence and joy? This is the temper and conduct to which a firm belief of the Gospel wil

After these declarations of Jesus, the Apostles professed to have received entire satisfaction, and ar assured persuasion of his high character and divine original. But, alas! they were not sufficiently aware of their own weakness. He warned them, that strong as their faith might seem, the hour was at

and when they would all be so shaken in their rinciples as to desert him; yet, notwithstanding heir treachery, he rejoiced that he should be supported by virtue of his union with the Father. It is ot wrong to declare what are our views of Christ, nd what affections we feel towards him; but the olemn admonition here given teaches us not to boast of the clearness of our knowledge, or the warmth of our attachment. We may soon be brought into such rials as may stagger and confound us, and, for a season at least, be "moved away from the hope of the Gospel," as if we had found the whole system a delusion. It will be our wisdom, as well as duty, under a diffidence of ourselves, to rely upon the grace of God, which alone can preserve us, and to pray, "Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live; and let me not be ashamed of my hope \*."

Yet we admire the forbearance and tenderness of Jesus, even in the view of their inconstancy. He did not frown upon them, but encouraged them by an assurance, that, through faith in his name, they should still possess a constant source of peace, and an antidote to the cup of tribulation, which the world would soon give them to drink. And, while he warned them to look for severe opposition and sharp distress from its assaults, he closed his address with exhorting them to maintain a holy cheerfulness and courage, in full dependence upon Him their victorious Leader. It is the will of Jesus, then, that his fainting people should be comforted; and even that those, who have betrayed an unsteadiness in his service, should not despond, but be induced to return, and trust in his love. O, how large are his compassions!

We ask, What are your expectations of happiness? Are you seeking it in present things? Alas! you

<sup>\*</sup> Psal, cxix, 116.

will be miserably disappointed: Jesus alone can bestow the precious treasure, nor will you ever obtain it till you be willing to receive it at his hands. You cannot enjoy his favour and that of the world together. If you follow him with fidelity and zeal, you must prepare to meet resistance, and arm yourselves for a severe conflict. He, however, whom you serve, has already overcome your enemies; and you may rejoice in this confidence, that they shall be subdued under your feet, because they are fallen under His. O, desert not his standard, and you shall soon share in the honours of his triumph, and

sit down with him in his kingdom!

He had concluded his farewell address to his beloved attendants, and was now on the point of departing. But, that no proof might be wanting of his paternal regards, and nothing omitted which could sooth the pangs of separation, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and with fervent intercessions commended to God the Father his adopted children \*. John, who was then present, has recorded the prayer; and it remains an everlasting monument of the strong and invariable attachment of Christ to his church, and ensures the providence which shall save it from the malice of men and devils. It was also adapted to his own peculiar circumstances, who had but a few hours more to live in the world: and his conduct on that occasion teaches us to wait for our great change in the exercise of ardent devotion. It appears, indeed, as we have observed, to have been dictated by a tender regard to the situation of his Apostles, who, perplexed and tempted as they were, stood in need of all that protection, support, and comfort, which he solicited his Father to grant them. The prayer, however, may likewise be considered as a pattern of that prevailing intercession which he carries on in heaven, and which he will continue to offer to the

<sup>\*</sup> John xvii. 1, &c.

end of time, for the benefit of every member of his

There are those who represent it as inconsistent with the doctrine of his Godhead that he should ever be a supplicant. But they seem willing to forget that part of the Christian's creed, which maintains that Jesus was very man as well as very God; that as man he was required to "fulfil all righteousness," and therefore among other duties to perform that of prayer. Besides, in that state of humiliation, being a partaker of our weaknesses, he had occasion to implore assistance from above, even as we curselves; and he received that assistance in answer to his own petitions. Yet in his remarkable address to Heaven, which we now proceed to consider, he discovers a superior dignity. The language is such as a mere man cannot adopt; it will not suit any other than Him, who is our Immanuel, possessed of two natures, "God manifest in the flesh."

He began with a request for himself. He could not be unmindful of his own situation, with which such important events were connected. As he was about to close his work on earth, it was his earnest desire to be so supported, that the conclusion might be truly honourable. The grand decisive hour was at hand, on which the whole of his mediatorial undertaking depended; anxious, therefore, for the glory of God and the salvation of his people, he prayed that he might be sustained in the conflict, and crowned with victory. This he solicited and obtained. A divine power attended him in his deepest humiliation; an angel appeared to strengthen him in the garden; his enemies were struck to the ground; his very judge testified his innocence; the conversion of a dying sinner gave a lustre to his cross; the heavens were darkened, the earth shook, the vail of the temple was rent, and the graves opened, in answer to this request, that the dignity of the Saviour might be attested. Doubtless he had a view likewise to those subsequent events, his resurrection and ascension, the miraculous effusion of the Spirit, and the efficacious influence of the Gospel; and these also have signally displayed his high character.

He considered himself in possession of universal dominion, to be exercised with an especial regard to the salvation of his people, according to the divine covenant. To this end it was necessary for them to be brought to the knowledge of the true God, and of the scheme of redemption through the Son. Having invariably pursued the great plan intrusted to him, and being about to perfect his engagements by the sacrifice of himself, he petitioned that he might again be admitted to participate of all that splendour of Deity, which he had enjoyed from everlasting in union with the Father, and of which he had divested himself that he might take up his abode upon earth .- He is now returned to that exalted state from which he descended; and surely, according to this description, it is meet that we adore him as our Lord and our God. A mere creature, or one raised to be God, as some vainly talk, could not speak thus; since, whatever glory he now possesses in heaven, he did possess before there was any creation. The doctrine is mysterious, but we rejoice in it, as laying a firm foundation for our faith and hope.

In this address of Jesus to his Father, he bore upon his heart the case of his dear followers, and especially of his chosen Apostles. He appears, indeed, to have been more solicitous for them than for himself; so that, even in the mention of his own concerns, he had a view to their benefit. His disciples were his peculiar charge; they had been committed to him by express covenant; he had gradually trained them up for his service, and faithfully

instructed them in the divine will. They, on their part, had believed his declarations, understood his character, and steadfastly attached themselves to his cause. This he represented, while he interceded for them, exclusively of others who knew him not. He pleaded that they were the objects of his Father's peculiar choice and love, as well as of his own. argued that in this respect there could be no difference between Him and the Father, and that, as they possessed the same perfections, their counsels must accord, and the same persons be equally dear to them both. Being therefore about to depart, he solemnly commended his favoured attendants to the care of his God, and prayed, that, for the honour of his name, they might be preserved from the snares to which they were exposed, and be knit together by an indissoluble union of affection. He had watched over them during his residence

among them, and had kept them in the faith; so that Judas only had apostatized, according to the predictions of the Scripture. And now, upon returning to his Father, he offered up these petitions in their presence, that their happiness in him might be confirmed and completed. He observed, that, as they had received his doctrine, and, like him, differed so widely in conduct and spirit from the world, they were generally rejected with abhorrence, and no other treatment could be looked for. not solicitous that they should be immediately taken to heaven, merely to avoid the violence of persecution: he knew that it was expedient for them to remain longer upon earth; but he prayed most fervently that they might not be overcome by temptation, or betrayed into dishonourable conducts. He requested, that, while they separated from sinners, they might be continually advancing in real

holiness, through the powerful energy of divine truth upon their minds. For this purpose he pleaded the importance of their office, as they were his ambassadors, appointed to promote the grand object of his own mission: and he expressed his desire, that, as he devoted himself to his work with a view to their spiritual good, they might receive more abundant grace, and feel the sanctifying influence of that

Gospel which they were about to preach.

What do we learn from all this? Among other things, we cannot but remark the earnest concern of Jesus for the interest of true religion. These his dear servants, so commissioned, obtained a peculiar honour; and to the prevalency of this intercession, not to any natural excellence or superiority in them, we must ascribe their ardent zeal, their unshaken confidence, their exemplary holiness, and amazing success. Let their history, from the day of Pentrecost, testify how fully his prayers were answered. We rejoice that he still sends out ministers for the enlargement and edification of his church, that he is solicitous to preserve and bless them by his grace, and gives efficacy to their labours. They should seriously contemplate the character of the Apostles, as here stated by their Lord, that they may judge what manner of persons they themselves ought to be. It is expedient for them, doubtless, as it was for the Apostles, to be cordially attached to the Saviour, and to possess an eminent measure of divine knowledge, faith, and holiness; and it is equally necessary to pray that they may be kept from the evil of the world, united together in love, and sanctified through the truth, which they preach. Let them, therefore, commend their cause to Jesus, who, as their Advocate in heaven, will plead for them, and they shall receive sufficient grace as the fruit of his mediation.

But private Christians, as well as ministers, may derive encouragement from this solemn intercession of Jesus. They are all dear to him; nor can he ever

be unmindful of their interests. Accordingly, he extended his petitions in behalf of all those, who, in every age and country, should be induced by the doctrine of the Apostles to place their unfeigned reliance upon Him. How important to each of us is this declaration! We are favoured with an authentic account of those truths which the Apostles taught; but have we been so influenced by their word as to believe in the Saviour? If it appear that we possess this faith, then we may conclude that he pleaded for us, and that "he offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying" on our behalf. Let us carefully remark the blessings which he has

implored, and expect to receive them.

He prayed that all his people might be joined together as one body, partaking of the same Spirit, and dwelling in the Father and the Son, by a divine' and mysterious union, even resembling that which subsists between the Persons of the Godhead. This request he urged with peculiar earnestness, observing that he bestowed his grace upon them with a view to that very end, and that their close and affectionate attachment to each other would afford a strong evidence to the world of the truth of his mission, and of the love of God towards them. Are we aware of the importance of maintaining this Christian concord? And do we carefully avoid whatever may prevent or interrupt it? Are peace and harmony among the different members of the church the most forcible recommendation of our religion? Alas! how much cause we have to lament that it is exposed to the scorn of infidels by the bitter contentions which have so generally prevailed! Or, how can it appear that we are the objects of the divine complacency, while we are malicious and vindictive? O, may the Saviour impart to us a more abundant measure of his Spirit, and thereby unite us to himself, and to each other, in the bonds of love, to the

praise of his own grace, and our unspeakable con-

Jesus looked forward to the eternal world, and prayed not only for the credit of religion, and the happiness of his people in this life, but for the consummation of their bliss and glory in his immediate presence for ever. This he claimed rather than requested, even demanding their final salvation on the ground of the Father's engagements, and everlasting delight in him. Let us contemplate, with admiration, gratitude, and joy, the declaration of our Redeemer's will, as here expressed. It may justly inspire us with hope and confidence. If we are believers indeed, we shall behold his glory; for that state of exaltation has been prepared for us from the foundation of the world. Such is his counsel of

mercy, which shall not be frustrated.

Jesus closed the solemn intercession by commending to the care of the Father his chosen Apostles, as distinguished from others by their knowledge of his truth; expressing at the same time an earnest desire that they might continue to be favoured with an abiding sense of the love of God, and engaging himself to take up his residence within them.—Through the whole of this scene the Redeemer is exhibited in the most endearing light; and, from the view of his compassion and faithfulness, we may be emboldened He is, "the same to trust ourselves under his care. vesterday, and to-day, and for ever \*." He, who was so solicitous for the perseverance and happiness of his ancient disciples, will not forget or neglect the least and meanest of his servants in the present day. To all of them, without exception, he has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee t." Let us rejoice in the fulness of his grace, and long for the promised vision of his glory.

But does the benefit of this intercession extend to

<sup>\*</sup> Heb. xiii. 8. † xiii. 5.

every reader? If carnal affections predominate in your hearts, and you feel no cordial attachment to the Saviour, you have "neither part nor lot in this matter." He said, "I pray not for the world:" and does not that distinction exclude you, remaining as you are? What, then, will you do without his favour? Whatever temporal advantages you may now possess, you cannot inherit his kingdom; but, if you die in unbelief, you will be driven away with shame and everlasting contempt. As yet, however, he waits to be gracious, and commands the word of salvation to be preached. "Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts \*."

\* Heb. iii. 7, 8.

## JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 29.

Jesus retired to Gethsemane—warned his disciples suffered an extreme agony—was bett ayed by Judas forsaken by the other Apostles—examined before the high-priests, condemned, and insulted.

ALL the preceding circumstances in the life of Jesus have been preparatory, and are to be regarded as subservient to that important event which we proceed to consider. He came into the world, not merely to teach or exhibit an example of righteousness, but chiefly to suffer. Now the sharp conflict commences, now the tremendous scene is unfolded to our view. This is not a subject for amusement, or curious speculation: it calls for the vigorous exercise of holy and devout affections. While we contemplate the Son of God, bowed down under his accumulated trials, let us learn what our sins required, and what a debt of gratitude we owe. O blessed Jesus, who didst stoop so low, and endure so much for our salvation, help us to conceive, as we ought, of our own guilt and wretchedness, and the condescensions of thy love! Communicate to us the inestimable benefits which thou hast procured: " By thine agony and bloody sweat, by thy cross and passion,—Good Lord, deliver us \*."

Jesus, having left the guest-chamber, departed from the city with his eleven Apostles towards the mount of Olives †. Upon the road thither he warned them, that, notwithstanding their professions of regard, they would all desert him in the hour of his

<sup>\*</sup> itany. † Matt. xxvi. 31—56. Mark xiv. 27—52. Luke xxii. 39—53. John xviii. 1—12.

extremity. According to an ancient prediction, the Shepherd being smitten, the sheep should be scattered abroad\*. Still anxious for their encouragement, he assured them, that, though he should be put to death, he would rise again: instead of upbraiding their cowardice and unbelief, he promised to meet them after that event, and appointed a particular place in Galilee, where he would receive them, and confirm their faith and love. Behold how gracious the Lord is to his wavering and backsliding people! "Though they fall, they shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholdeth them with his hand †."

Not sufficiently aware of their own weakness, they could not credit the declaration of their dear Master, and therefore solemnly protested that they would hazard every thing, even life itself, in a fixed and resolute adherence to Him. Peter, in particular, expressed the strongest abhorrence of the deed: but Jesus, who "understandeth our thoughts afar off," told him, in reply, that that very night would witness the shaking of his confidence, his repeated perjuries, and his disgraceful denial of his Master. How often are we reminded of human depravity! By numerous instances we are instructed to take heed to ourselves, to distrust our hearts, and seek for a better security from spiritual declension than a reliance on our own firmness and constancy.

Jesus arrived at his intended place of retirement, a garden called Gethsemane, where he had been accustomed to retreat, and had frequently passed the night in devotion. Here, probably, by prayer and meditation, he meant to prepare for the approaching sufferings, of which he had a full view. When we look for uncommon difficulties, we ought to be, in a more especial manner, frequent and fervent in our applications to the throne of grace. If we thus meet our

<sup>\*</sup> Zech. xiii. 7. + Psal. xxxvii. 24.

troubles, we may expect to receive all needful support and consolation.

Out of the eleven who then attended him our Lord selected three, Peter, James, and John. They had been favoured with a sight of his glorious transfiguration, and were now designed to be witnesses of his deep distress. With them, therefore, he retired to a separate part, and immediately began to feel an inexpressible anguish and terror. Very remarkable are the words of the Evangelists, when they attempt to describe the painful sensations which then came upon him through an invisible influence. They imply, says the learned Bishop Pearson, that he was " suddenly, upon a present and immediate apprehension, possessed with fear, horror, and amazement, encompassed with grief, and overwhelmed with sorrow. pressed down with consternation and dejection of mind, tormented with anxiety and disquietude of spirit \*."

Probably he discovered inward perplexity and confusion by his countenance. He declared to his three chosen companions that his soul was beyond measure afflicted, and, as it were, surrounded with the very pains of death; and desired that they would continue with him in holy watchfulness, and pray for themselves, that they might not be brought into the perilous conflict. He then withdrew to a little distance. that, being quite alone, he might pour out his heart with the greater freedom before God. He kneeled down; he fell upon his face, and requested, that, if it were possible, the extreme distress, by which he was oppressed, might be removed or shortened. He cried out with expressions of sharpest anguish, and yet of unfeigned submission, "O my Father, if thus thine honour can be secured, and the salvation of thy people accomplished, let the bitter cup, from which my nature shrinks, be taken from me. But I resign my-

<sup>\*</sup> Pearson on the Creed, p. 190.

elf to thy wise and sovereign will: I decline not the vork in which I am engaged; and, therefore, let thy

ourposes be fulfilled, whatever I may suffer."

When he had prayed to this effect, he returned to is three disciples, whom he found asleep. Ah! how inmindful they were of their Lord's affliction, and of he solemn charge which he had given them! Immeliately he roused them with a serious, though gentle, dmonition, upbraiding them all, and Peter more specially, for their unwillingness to bear their part with him in holy vigilance, even for so short a season. He likewise repeated his former injunction, that they should be upon their guard, consider their danger, and by fervent supplications draw down strength from Heaven against the hour of severe trial. Do we ask why they betrayed such a backwardness to this neessary duty? The compassionate Jesus accounted or it, though the reason does not furnish an excuse: "The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak." This clearly showed the tenderness of his disposition towards them. He uttered no peevish complaints of their unkindness, but acknowledged their cordial attachment, and lamented that their good desires were obstructed by the weariness of their bodies, and the corruption of their nature.

A second time he withdrew, and offered up similar petitions. He declared again his entire submission to the Father's will, and perfect acquiescence with that very appointment, at which the weakness of humanity shuddered. On returning to his disciples, he found them once more overpowered with sleep. This trange stupor called forth a fresh rebuke, which so confounded them, that they had nothing to reply; yet they were not awakened to any lasting attention. Let us be ashamed of our own hardness and assensibility to the agonies which purchased our

edemption.

The Saviour retired a third time, and prayed as beore. On that occasion, it should seem, he was just sinking under the weight of his distress, when an ange from heaven was commissioned to administer support and consolation. Was the struggle, then, immediately concluded? No: his consternation remained, perhapsincreased: being in an agony, engaged as it were in sharp conflict, he cried to God with still greater ardour. Such was the intenseness of his soul, that his whole frame was thrown into a violent agitation. He was prostrate in the cold night, yet sweat profusely nay, the very blood forced its way through the innumerable pores of his body, and fell in large drops upon the ground. Then, as well as at his crucifixion, that prophetical declaration was fulfilled, "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels \*."

Where were the disciples of Jesus in this season of his extreme anguish? An angel, as we have seen, was sent for his relief; but was there no earthly friend to support his drooping head? No: he had occasion to lament that he found no comforters. Those, who made the most solemn protestations of regard, were inattentive to his distress. The three most favoured Apostles, though they had been twice before reproved for their drowsiness, had fallen asleep again. Their grief, indeed, contributed, in some measure, to produce this effect: but, doubtless they betrayed the weakness and deficiency of their spiritual principles. He returned, repeated his reproof, and intimated that it was too late to observe his neglected injunction, that the time for watching and prayer was expired, and that he should be immediately delivered into the hands of wicked men. Then, having recovered from his agony, and not dreading the event, he called upon them to arise, that they might meet the traitor, who was approaching with a band of ruffians to appre hend him.

The whole of this narration fills us with wonder

<sup>\*</sup> Psal, xxii. 14.

and at the same time suggests the most important instructions. We cannot but express our surprise at the conduct of the disciples, circumstanced as they were. Doubtless they were highly blamable in disregarding their dear Lord, when he requested their peculiar attention, and neglecting his repeated admonitions. But, while we mourn over them, relapsing into the same fault again and again, we are reminded of our own depravity, and taught not to be confident of ourselves, however sincere and earnest we may be in right principles; for, though "the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak."

Our eyes are more especially fixed upon the Saviour, who, under his unutterable anguish, exhibits a perfect pattern of patience and meekness. Let us learn to suffer with the same disposition. There are infirmities attached to humanity which we may feel without sin, so as to shrink under the pressure, or in the prospect of calamities. We may, therefore, innocently desire the cup to pass from us. But we are instructed, from the view of Jesus in the garden, to surrender up ourselves without reserve to the divine disposal, and to consult the glory of God and the salvation of men, rather than our own present ease and comfort. Under the most painful feelings, while we spread our case before the Lord, and entreat his gracious interposition, we should possess such an entire resignation as to be able to say, " Not what I will, but what thou wilt." Have we attained this temper? How far otherwise! Do not our trials draw forth our corruption, and prove that we are very opposite to the mind of Christ? Ah! what pride and petulance, what unbelief and discontent, do we betray in sharp afflictions! We are ready to quarrel with Jehovah for appointing us so arduous a post: we entertain hard thoughts of him if deliverance be not instantly vouchsafed; and it should seem, from our vehement impatience, that we could wish every consideration

to be sacrificed to our own ease and convenience. If this be the case, surely we do not watch and pray: we are not prepared for the conflict, and a defeat

may be expected.

It is inquired, What could be the occasion of the Saviour's extreme distress and remarkable agony? There was no visible external cause of that perplexity and horror which he discovered. He appears not to have suffered through excessive pain of body: nor ought we to suppose that he was terrified, merely under the apprehensions of approaching dangers, or that he repented of his undertaking. Never did he show more distinguished courage, or more clearly manifest his desire of saving sinners at any expense to himself. Yet, consistently with this assertion, it may be allowed, that human nature, even in the holy Jesus, might shudder at the prospect of such severe calamities.

It is said, that many martyrs have possessed greater composure and intrepidity of mind, when they were meeting death in its most dreadful forms. But the comparison ought not to be admitted, as the circumstances are so widely different. Jesus was afflicted in a way, and from causes, peculiar to himself: nor is it possible that any other man could endure what was laid upon him. He stood as "the Repairer of the breach," to turn away from us the vengeance of our offended God, interposing himself between us and the stroke of justice. Therefore "it pleased the Lord to bruise him: He hath put him to grief \*." In that view, his mind suffered much more than his body; and before he came to the cross he felt inexpressible agonies, not merely in the prospect of his passion, but from the immediate hand of God pressing his spirit. In Gethsemane, then, while we accompany the Saviour bowed down under "the terrors of God," we behold the deep malignity of sin, and

<sup>\*</sup> Isa, liji, 10,

perceive, that, if we should answer for our own offences, the burden would be heavier than we could bear.

It should seem, also, that Satan had considerable influence in producing or increasing the distress on this remarkable occasion. Jesus had just before declared that the malicious adversary was preparing to attack him, and probably the fiend was then permitted to vent his utmost rage, and make his fiercest onset. But, however he might harass, he could not overcome; and this very conflict turned to his greater confusion. Jesus obtained the victory, and, as "the Captain of our salvation," is able to deliver those who are tempted. Only let us follow his standard, and we may exult in the hope of sharing his glorious conquest.

At the close of his agony, Jesus had announced to his disciples the approach of the traitor; and at that instant Judas came upon them with an armed company. This infamous Apostle had previously sold his Master; and, as he knew the place of his retirement, he now took the opportunity of conducting a large and mixed multitude of persons, for the express purpose of seizing him by force. Judas went up to address him with that vile hypocrisy which marked his character, endeavouring to conceal the basest designs under the guise of friendship. Still professing respect and affection, he saluted his Lord, and with a kiss betrayed him into the hands of his enemies.

Was no resistance made, or escape attempted? No: a cutting reproof was given to the traitor, for being the leader in such a business, and with such dissimulation: but Jesus fled not from the danger. Though he had a clear view of all his sufferings, he advanced with amazing fortitude towards the very men who wished to apprehend him. Having declared himself the Person whom they sought, he displayed his

majesty through an invisible influence, by which they were instantly confounded, and struck to the ground, in his presence. After so remarkable a proof of his power, it was a signal evidence of their obduracy to resume and prosecute their scheme. He might have cluded their pursuit; but he cheerfully surrendered himself, insisting only one condition, that his disciples might be dismissed in safety. How kind and tender was his concern for his dear and affectionate attendants even to the last!

Jesus, the high and exalted Personage, whose name is, "King of kings and Lord of lords," submitted to be taken into custody, and even to be bound. Amazing sight indeed! Those who accompanied him proposed to resist: and Peter, with his usual forwardness, actually drew a sword in his Master's defence, and cut off the ear of the highpriest's servant. This was a hasty and imprudent step, for which Jesus rebuked him, observing that such means of protection were improper in their case, and generally proved destructive. He added, that, if it had been expedient, he could easily have obtained the assistance of numerous armies of angels; but that, with a view to fulfil the Scriptures, he cheerfully acquiesced in the Father's appointment, though painful to himself.

To prevent the bad effects of Pcter's rashness, Jesus immediately exerted his miraculous power, and healed the wounded person. He graciously interfered to allay the resentment of the armed company, and correct the mistake, which might have been fatal to his disciples. He inquired of his enemies why they came against him with such a formidable force, as they had no reason to expect opposition; and why they had not seized him before, when he gave them the fairest opportunities. But, as he remarked, their malice, which had been restrained, was then let loose upon him, and the infernal spirits

were permitted to employ their utmost influence: yet their united efforts could prevail no further than

to fulfil the prophecies of Scripture.

The sight of Jesus as a prisoner in the hands of the wicked was more than any of the Apostles could bear. They were staggered, as if they had been deluded; and terrified, as being left defenceless. Forgetful, therefore, of their late protestations, they all forsook him, and consulted only how they might secure themselves by flight. Oh! the base ingratitude and treachery of their conduct! This defection must have been more painful to Jesus than all the violence of his opposers. It furnishes, however, some useful lessons: it teaches us not to glory in men; not to depend on the firmness of the most eminent characters; nor to confide in any wisdom, strength, or goodness of our own, as sufficient to preserve us in the hour of temptation. May God of his mercy keep us from falling; or else "the fiery trial," which may possibly come upon us, will prove our weakness in a still more awful manner! They neglected to improve the season of retirement allowed them; and from the same causes, indulgence of sloth, and omission of watchfulness and prayer, many have forsaken and dishonoured Christ. How forcible an argument for attention to duty!

But, turning our eyes to Jesus, we behold an inexpressible majesty and meekness in his deportment. The splendour of his divinity broke forth, even in this low state of meanness and abasement. His power and grace were both wonderfully exhibited; and in the union of the two the security of our salvation consists. The Redeemer stood alone, being deserted of all his adherents, even those who had seemed most faithful, and who had vowed that they would die with him. Yet he expressed no resentment; nor did he, in any measure, depart from his purpose. He went through his work "in the great-

ness of his strength," actuated by an ardent desire to accomplish the will of God, and make reconciliation for his people, whatever he might endure. O, look unto Jesus, and consider for what ends this amazing transaction was designed! Do you not feel a cordial regard to him for his voluntary submission to so much contempt and suffering? Does it not confirm your hope, and inspire you with an expectation of pardon,

peace, and heaven?

Jesus was hurried away as a criminal from Gethsemane to Jerusalem, and there dragged from one part of the city to another. He was taken first to the house of Annas, and then to the palace of Caiaphas, the high-priest, where, it should seem, though in the dead of night, the principal members of the sanhedrim were assembled, waiting to receive their prisoner\*. Here he underwent an examination before his malicious and enraged enemies. They questioned him concerning his followers and doctrine. He meekly replied, that he had said nothing in a covert manner; and appealed to those who had heard his instructions, as the proper witnesses to be interrogated on the subject. For this gentle answer he received a blow, accompanied with marks of disdain, from an officer who stood near him. It is no slight provocation for an innocent person, when unjustly apprehended and brought to trial, to meet with indignities from the guard who attends him, or the inferior ministers of justice. Jesus, however, with astonishing patience, sought no vindication, but desired only to know whether what he had spoken deserved such treatment.

The holy Jesus was arraigned: but what accusation was brought against him? Pains were taken to furnish, if possible, the least shadow of a charge, on which his condemnation might be grounded. Re-

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xxvi. 57, &c. Mark xiv. 53, &c. Luke xxii. 54, &c. John xviii. 18-27.

wards were offered to any one who would perjure themselves, and deliver such a testimony as might afford his judges a plausible pretext for putting him to death; a measure on which they had determined. But persons of that description, and whose aid seemed necessary, could not readily be found. So strong a restraint does God impose upon the minds even of the dissolute and abandoned, that they are afraid to affirm what their inclinations would dictate. Were not this the case, there would be but poor security in society either for property or life; and the righteous especially would be so attacked by the lying tongue, that they could no longer maintain their place in the world.

At length two witnesses arose, who gave some incoherent accounts and gross misrepresentations of what Jesus had said above three years before, concerning the destruction and rebuilding of the temple \*. Weak and absurd as the charge was, his enemies endeavoured to make it of consequence. On this ground they determined to try their prisoner, and accordingly, at the approach of day, they removed him to the grand chamber of the sanhedrim, where they sat in full council, and put him upon his defence. He, however, replied not to the accusation. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth +." They were surprised at his silence; but he still refused to enter on his vindication, knowing that it could answer no purpose before those who had resolved to destroy him.

The high-priest then required him, by the most solemn form of adjuration, to declare upon oath whether he was indeed the promised Messiah. Immediately he replied, in the most explicit terms, that he was; and maintained, that, notwithstanding his

<sup>\*</sup> John ii. 19.

<sup>+</sup> Isa, liii, 7.

mean appearance, and their contempt of him, they should one day behold him in a state of the highest exaltation and glory, descending from heaven with divine majesty, as the supreme and universal Judge. This bold and open avowal of his character incensed them the more. They considered him as guilty of the most shocking impiety in claiming so high a dignity, and agreed that he ought to suffer death as

a blasphemer.

Did no one, then, arise to plead his cause, and wipe off the aspersion? No: the opportunity, generally allowed to criminals, of producing any favourable testimonies, was denied to Jesus; a circumstance which had itself been predicted \*. Two of the sanhedrim dissented from the rest; but it does not appear that they stood forth in his defence †. His own disciples had deserted him. Peter and John, indeed, seemed to have recovered themselves from their flight, but they followed him only at a distance, and dared not speak in his defence. Nay, Peter, with profane imprecations, denied that he had ever known him.

The trial being ended fresh insults were offered to Jesus. He was treated by the lowest of the servants with insolent and cruel indignities, mocked, spit upon, buffeted, blindfolded, and beaten on the face; and at the same time the most vile blasphemies were uttered in derision and contempt. In various instances he fulfilled the prophetical description: He was "a reproach of men, and despised of the people;"—"he hid

Bishop Lowth on this passage observes, that no one was punished for a capital crime till proclamation had been made before the prisoner, allowing those who knew him to give evidence in his favour. But, in the trial and condemnation of Jesus, the usual rule was not observed: no proclamation was made for any person to bear witness to his innocence, nor did any one yoluntarily step forth to give such an attestation.

<sup>\*</sup> Isa. liii. 8. "By an oppressive judgment he was taken off;
"And his manner of life who would declare?"

<sup>+</sup> Luke xxiii. 50, 51. John xix. 32, 39.

not his face from shame and spitting \*." How wonderful were his condescension and meekness! how detestable the injustice and malevolence of his persecutors!

What is the treatment which the Saviour receives from us? It is generally allowed that the conduct of the Jews was wrong; but is ours defensible? It is possible that we may inveigh loudly and bitterly against their iniquitous proceedings, and yet be actuated by similar dispositions. This, at least, we know; neglect and hatred of Christ prevail among ourselves. "He is despised and rejected of men +." There are those who turn away from him with disdain, and refuse to hear his character and truth vindicated. There are those, likewise, who seek for objections, and vent their rage in profane and blasphemous speeches against him. All such we warn and exhort. O, consider whom you scorn and oppose! It is no other than "the Christ, the Son of the blessed God." And will you take part with his enemies? What, then, can you expect the consequence to be? He does not, indeed, instantly confound you, but for the present allows you to triumph, and to show what is in your hearts. Yet, "hereafter you shall see him sitting on the right hand of the power of God, and coming in the clouds of heaven." You must stand at his bar, answer for your insolent contempt of his Gospel, and receive your final sentence from his mouth. O turn to him now, while he waits to be gracious, that you may have confidence and joy before him at the great day of his appearing! Amen.

<sup>\*</sup> Psal. xxii. 6. Isa. l. 6. † Isa. liii. 3.

## JESUS CHRIST.

SECT. 40.

Jesus was examined before Pontius Pilate and Herod, scourged, derided, condemned, and crucified.

WE are now called to behold the most stupendous and distressful sight ever exhibited: the highest greatness in the lowest state of abasement; perfect innocence overwhelmed with extreme suffering; the most transcendent excellence treated with general contempt and abhorrence. It is Jesus, "the Lord of" glory," who was crucified for us men, and for our salvation. "The Holy One of God" submitted to be ranked with infamous malefactors, to endure excruciating tortures, and to be cut off by a violent death, as unworthy to live. This is a sight, which angels, probably, viewed with astonishment. To Satan the transaction might seem to furnish matter of exultation for the moment; but it will certainly turn to his entire and everlasting confusion. With what affections shall we regard it? A serious contemplation of the subject will excite in us emotions of godly sorrow and genuine repentance, and inflame our hearts with holy love and zeal. It is not a tragical fiction, designed merely to move the passions, but an awful reality, which is of unspeakably greater importance than any other occurrence in the history of mankind. We shall relate the facts simply as they are recorded, deducing only those practical reflections which naturally offer themselves to our consideration.

Jesus, we have seen, had been already tried and condemned by the high-priest and the grand council of the sanhedrim. We might have expected, therefore, that they would proceed to stone him, according to their law, and as they had frequently attempted to do in the violence of their rage. But how then would the Scriptures have been fulfilled? They foretold that the Messiah should suffer a particular kind of death, different from that which the Jewish statutes appointed, a death of peculiar ignominy and excessive torture. And it is worthy of remark that as the Jews were at this time in subjection to a foreign yoke, and the privilege of inflicting capital punishments was vested in their conquerors, so the code of the Roman power had annexed to the crimes of the basest of mankind the pains of crucifixion. The slave alone was condemned to be suspended on the cross; and to this was the Saviour reserved.

Good Friday, Accordingly, in the morning, after all or the Day the sanhedrim had consulted together by of our Lord's what means they might most effectually accomplish their wishes in the destruction of Jesus, they commanded him again to be bound, conducted him to the judgment-hall of Pontius Pilate, the governor, or vicegerent, of the Roman cmperor, and there requested the immediate trial of the prisoner\*. The Jews themselves, however, under the pretence of a religious scruple, refused to enter the hall, lest they should contract ceremonial uncleanness from a place which belonged to the Gentiles, and be unfitted for a participation of the sacrifices offered at the passover. Nothing could more strongly mark their hypocrisy. At the very time they were filled with malignant rage, and intent on shedding innocent blood, they were unwilling to omit the outward forms of devotion, and dreaded a ritual defilement. To what purpose, we ask, are men exact in external observances, while the vilest affections maintain an ascendancy in their hearts?

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xxvii. 1, 2, 11—\$3. Mark xv. 1—14. Luke xxii. 1—23. John xviii. 28, &c.

Is the Lord God, who trieth the reins, thus to be im-

of regard to his service?

Pilate condescended to comply with their scruples. and instituted his examination of the prisoner in the open air. He inquired, therefore, what charge they urged against him: they replied, that he had been convicted before them as a notorious malefactor. But, not choosing to proceed upon so general a declaration, or solicitous to be rid of the disagreeable business, he desired them to take the matter into their own hands, and manage the prosecution according to their law. They pleaded, however, that they could not inflict a capital punishment without his express warrant. They said, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death;" confessing on this occasion with readiness, what they were generally unwilling to do, their subjection to the Roman power. But all these circumstances were so ordered, that the Scriptures might have their completion, by the particular mode in which Jesus suffered. The Lord God omnipotent reigneth, and renders all events subservient to his own purposes.

To incense the Romans against the prisoner, the Jews alleged that he had been guilty of seditious practices, having opposed the payment of the emperor's tribute, and claimed regal honours to himself. Many other charges they preferred, endeavouring to traduce his character by the basest insinuations. To all these he made no reply, being content to bear reproach for our sakes; and his patient silence struck

even Pilate with astonishment.

The governor then returned into the hall, and examined him more privately respecting those treasonable designs of which he was accused. Jesus argued, that the peaceable deportment of himself and his followers sufficiently proved that he aimed not at temporal dominion: yet he maintained that he came

into the world on purpose to establish another sort of kingdom, and concluded with a solemn admonition to his judge, to attend to the important truth, which he then witnessed before him. Pilate probably being affected with this declaration, put the question, "What is truth?" but he waited not, perhaps wished not, for an answer. Ah! how many begin, but soon give up, the momentous inquiry, being drawn aside to some other object, before they obtain

any satisfactory information!

Pilate, however, being convinced of the innocence of Jesus, went out again, and bore an honourable testimony in his favour before his accusers, asserting that he had found no fault in him. But this very attestation enraged them the more; and immediately, with still greater vehemence, they charged him as the author of tumult and sedition throughout the country, from Galilee to Jerusalem. From the mention of Galilee, it appeared that the prisoner properly belonged to the jurisdiction of Herod, the tetrarch of that district, who was then at Jerusalem: accordingly Pilate referred the matter to his decision, desirous to gain his favour, and relieve himself from trouble.

Herod was the man who had beheaded the Baptist. He rejoiced to see Jesus, probably from the motive of mere curiosity, as he had heard so much of this famous worker of miracles. Here also Jesus underwent a trial; but to the many questions which the king proposed he made no reply. The Jewish doctors, in their great zeal, followed him, and urged their malicious accusations: yet no proofs of guilt were produced. Herod and his soldiers treated him with the utmost scorn, as a poor contemptible creature, unworthy of any notice. Having clothed him with some splendid vestments, in derision of his pretensions to royalty, he sent him back again to Pilate.

Was the matter then determined? No: further

insults and cruelties were still in reserve. Had the Roman governor been upright, he would instantly have dismissed the prisoner. He was convinced of his innocence, and the more so from Herod's examination. Having therefore again summoned his opponents, he declared his belief that their charges were groundless, and proposed to release him, though not without scourging. Probably he thought that a slight kind of punishment would pacify their minds, and that something must be conceded to their rage. Through the whole of his conduct you observe the character of a mean time-serving man, resisting and at last stifling the dictates of his conscience, merely to conciliate the Jews, whom he had incensed by his former austerities. If, as he declared, he found no fault in the person accused, why did he not firmly maintain his cause against his malevolent persecutors? And especially, why did he offer to chastise an innocent man? It was a decisive proof of his want of integrity that he had not courage to act agreeably to his own convictions.

At the passover, the people were usually gratified by the Roman governor with the discharge of some one prisoner, whom they desired. Pilate therefore requested that Jesus might be set at liberty on that occasion. But Barabbas, a robber and a murderer, was preferred before the Saviour and the Prince of life. Three times together the whole body of the populace, urged on by their rulers, with great vehemence opposed his release, and cried out, "Away with him, crucify him, crucify him." To these tumultuous clamours, after some faint resistance, the weak, the unrighteous judge submitted, probably considering it as a matter of necessity that their rage must be appeased, even by the sacrifice of the

guiltless.

Yet sentence was not immediately pronounced. Pilate still endeavoured to save the life of Jesus, and,

it is supposed, with that view proceeded to scourge him, hoping that his enemies would then be satisfied. and no further acts of violence called for\*. This, of itself, was a vile indignity; but more ignominious usage and far greater cruelties succeeded. man soldiers concluded that he was now delivered into their power, and began to treat him with insolent contempt, as if he were an object for sport. They derided his claims of majesty, and clothed him with purple and scarlet; they crowned him with thorns (which pierced into his temples, and occasioned extreme anguish), put a reed into his right hand in resemblance of a sceptre, and then with bended knees paid their homage to him as King of the Jews. Nor did their scornful abuses stop here. With shameless wantonness and barbarity they spit upon him, and smote him on the head, that his crown of thorns might give him more excruciating pain.

Even this did not suffice. Pilate brought him forth again before the people, bearing the marks of that contempt and cruelty with which he had been treated, arrayed in mock majesty, and having his face defiled and covered with blood. Probably he supposed that their compassion might at length be excited; and therefore, having once more declared that Jesus had not been convicted of any guilt, he exclaimed, "Behold the man;" as if he had said, "While you view the wretchedness of the prisoner, upon whom no fault is proved, let your resentment be appeased, and all further persecution cease." But, to prevent lenient measures, their very teachers and leaders cried out, with the same acrimonious spirit as before, "Crucify him, crucify him." In vain did the judge continue to assert his innocence: they now varied their accusation, and insisted that he ought to die as a blasphemer, because he had claimed divine

Matt. xxvii. 24-31. Mark x ', 15-20. Luke xxii 24, 25.
 John xix. 1-16.

perfections in maintaining that he was the Son of God. This gave a fresh alarm to Pilate, who therefore withdrew from the multitude, and demanded of Jesus what was his original. Our Lord, however, refused to answer the inquiries of a man who would not act according to his conscience. This silence the governor considered as a contempt of his authority: but he was then reminded that his boasted power to save or to destroy was to be ascribed to a peculiar permission of Providence, and that he, though guilty, was less culpable than the promoters of the iniquitous

persecution.

Pilate, being now more than ever convinced of the prisoner's innocence, endeavoured to obtain his discharge. But fresh and stronger accusations were urged, and he himself was threatened, as being a traitor, an enemy to Cæsar, if he should acquit the Person who claimed regal honours. Intimidated by such a representation, he placed himself on the seat of judgment, and prepared to pass the solemn sentence. Yet probably in derision of those fears which the Jews seemed to entertain for the established government from such an opponent, he brought him forth again, and cried, "Behold your King!" They rejected him, as before, with expressions of the utmost disdain, and demanded his crucifixion.

What, then, remained to be done? Pilate found that all his endeavours to quiet the rage of the people were ineffectual; and, as he was determined to gratify them at any rate, he consented to the death of Jesus. But how shall his own conscience be pacified? As a wretched expedient for the removal of his scruples, he washed his hands in the presence of the multitude, declaring, in a solemn manner, that they, and not he, must answer for the blood of this innocent Person, whom they forced him to condemn. Unhappy Pilate! how much better would it have been for thee to have maintained a firm and inviolable regard to

righteousness and justice, and consulted thy own convictions rather than the clamours of a mob! What availed thy temporizing schemes! They betrayed the baseness of thy character, increased thy guilt, and

hastened thy destruction \*.

The case of the Jews was still more deplorable. Determined to hazard every consequence, if only their resentment might be gratified by the death of Jesus, they replied, "His blood be on us, and on our children." Thus they entailed the divine curse upon themselves and their posterity, for the murder of the Son of God. And we know that the vengeance of Heaven has fallen in a remarkable manner upon that miserable people, and continues to pursue them to this day, for the part they took in that horrid transaction.

At length the unrighteous judge pronounced the awful sentence, that the holy Jesus, whom he had repeatedly declared to be a blameless character, should be delivered to the will of the enraged multitude, to expire under the very severe tortures of crucifixion.

Here let us pause, that we may indulge our serious meditations on the whole of this amazing transaction. "Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself†." Recollect the high dignity of the Sufferer, and the cause of his voluntary humiliation; and then every circumstance here related will excite your devout astonishment. While you view with terror the obstinate and malignant rage of his enemies, you will admire and praise the condescensions of his love. Fix your regard upon him in this state of deep abasement. "Behold the man!" He is indeed "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief‡;" yet he is no other than "the man,

<sup>•</sup> Pilate was soon afterwards deposed from his government, through the accusations of the Jews, whom he had so studied to please: and it is said that he perished miserably by his own hands.

† Heb. xii. 3. ‡ Isa. liii, 3.

who is the fellow of the Lord of hosts \*." He submitted to be an object of sport and derision to those who were the creatures of his hands. He endured the vilest indignities from them, when he might have consigned them to destruction. He stood with silence and forbearance before his accusers, and resisted not the violence of such as buffeted and scourged him. We are ready to wonder that he did not strike dumb the tongue of the slanderer and busy mocker, and that he did not unnerve the injurious arm that was lifted up against him. But we learn from him "to take it patiently," whenever "for conscience toward God we endure grief, suffering wrongfully;" "because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again: when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously t."

In all these various circumstances, likewise, we mark the exact completion of ancient prophecies. Thus Messiah speaks, "The mouth of the wicked, and the mouth of the deceitful, are opened against me; they have spoken against me with a lying tongue. They compassed me about also with words of hatred; and fought against me without a cause t." "But I, as a deaf man, heard not; and I was as a dumb man, that openeth not his mouth §." "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting ||." We are, therefore, to regard the divine purpose in these minute events. The Jews and Romans, while they were left to the influence of their own passions, became the instruments of accomplishing the Scriptures and the decrees of God. Thus - the Apostles interpreted the matter, when they said, "Of a truth, against thy holy Child Jesus, whom

thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done \*." Such a view of the government of God, as overruling even the vilest designs of his enemies for his own glory, may tend to give us composure, confidence, and joy,

under the darkest dispensations.

The promoters of this malicious prosecution carried their point, and triumphed in the victory. The very sentence was passed which they had so eagerly desired; and immediately, after some fresh insults offered to the prisoner, they proceeded to the execution †. A cross, the instrument of torture and death, was prepared; and, part of the cumbrous load being laid upon him, he was compelled to bear it, so long as his fainting body could support the burden. Thus oppressed, he was led forth through the streets of the city towards Golgotha, that, according to the typical representations of the Jewish sacrifices, he might "suffer without the gate ‡."

What an awful procession was this! Jesus, the Son of God and the Saviour of men, whose whole life had been spent in works of mercy, conducted, amidst the general execrations of the people, as an atrocious criminal, "appointed to die!" Did not his opposers relent at the sight of his misery? The most notorious offenders in our country, when cut off from society by the sentence of the law, are pitied and prayed for by the surrounding multitudes. There are few spectators, on such an occasion, whose cheeks are not bedewed with tears of compassion. But Jesus was treated with insult and disdain, even

in this last tremendous scene.

At length he was relieved from the pressure of his burden, probably because he fainted. His

Acts iv. 27, 28. † Matt. xxvii. 31—35. Mark xv. 20—24.
 Luke xxiii. 26—33. John xix. 16—18. ‡ Heb. xiii. 11, 12.

attendants, not from benevolence, but to preserve his life for public execution, compelled Sinon, a Cyrenean, whom they met by the way, and perhaps suspected of being a disciple, to bear the cross in his stead.

Immense crowds of people joined the procession, and among the rest were some females, who, being deeply affected by the view of his sufferings, dared to express their tender commiseration. To them the compassionate Saviour looked with kind regard, and, declaring his own readiness to endure the utmost extremity, exhorted them to reserve their tears for other purposes, and bewail the miseries which were then about to fall upon themselves, their families, and their devoted country. He predicted that such would be the general desolation of the land, and such the distresses of mothers for their children, that barrenness would be accounted a peculiar happiness; and that his exulting enemies would shortly be so oppressed by terror and despair, as to long for an immediate dissolution, even by the most violent means. He added, that, considering the difference of their character from his, they could not look for the supports which he experienced, and that they were as dry fuel prepared for the burning. How solemn the admonition! And how needful is it still to weep for the multitudes who remain in avowed opposition to Christ! Miseries, inconceivably more dreadful than any temporal calamities, are coming upon them; so that, in the horror of their souls, they will wish for utter annihilation, and say to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand \*?"

Having arrived at the appointed place, they of-

fered him a cup to drink, not to alleviate, but increase, his distress. It was a bitter potion, and he refused it. Some have supposed that a different draught of a pleasant and generous cordial was prepared by his friends; and that, as he did not wish for any mitigation of his pain, he would not avail himself of their kindness.

The execution immediately followed. His hands being stretched out upon the transverse beam, and his feet fixed to the upright part of the cross, those tender and sensible members of the body were pierced through and nailed to the wood. The cross was then erected, and fastened in the ground; and the holy Sufferer remained suspended in extreme anguish. Such was the situation of Jesus when he "made his

soul an offering for sin."

And here, while we pause, that we may indulge our devout meditations, the inquiry almost forces itself upon us, Why was all this permitted? We are lost in wonder: yet, mysterious as the plan may be, God fulfilled his own purposes in the whole of this singular transaction. Thus it had been determined in the counsels of infinite wisdom; and therefore "thus it behoved Christ to suffer." The Scriptures of the Old Testament had predicted the grand event, with all its various circumstances: and it could not be otherwise but that every type and prophecy must have its full accomplishment.

It seemed unlikely that Jesus should die by crucifixion, because this was a Roman, not a Jewish, punishment; and it might have been expected, from the fury of the people, that they would have despatched him suddenly, without waiting for a formal trial or judicial process. But, amidst all the commotions which may arise from human machinations, "the Lord reigneth," and "the wrath of man shall praise him \*." While the enemies of Jesus followed

<sup>\*</sup> Psal. lxxvi. 10.

their own devices, their passions were overruled, in order that the great Antitype might answer to all the ancient figures by the manner of his death.

Isaac was directed to be offered as an oblation to God, and himself carried the wood which was designed to consume his body: and thus he represented the Redeemer, the appointed Victim for the expiation of our guilt, bearing his cross to Calvary. By the paschal lamb intimation had been given to the church for many preceding ages that "the Lamb of God" should be slain to take away the sins of the world, and yet be so remarkably preserved by the divine Providence, even in his extreme sufferings, that not a hone should be brokent. The cross of Christ, as the means of our deliverance, was still more clearly exhibited by the brazen serpent lifted up on a pole for the cure of the wounded Israelites in the wilderness +. From the history before us it appears that each of these signs has received an exact completion.

Some express predictions, also, rendered this particular kind of death expedient and necessary. Thus the Messiah speaks by David, "They pierced my hands and my feet;" and by Zechariah, "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced §." The piercing of the body, especially in the parts here specified, evidently denoted crucifixion. Now, suppose, for a moment, that Jesus had suffered in any other way, these prophecies would have failed, and he himself been found an impostor and deceiver; for he had declared that he should be delivered to the Gentiles, to be mocked, and scourged, and

CRUCIFIED II.

But, in contemplating this subject, let us not rest in speculation. If "before our eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth crucified among us,"

<sup>\*</sup> Exod. xii. 46. John xix. 36. † iii. 14, 15. ‡ Psal. xxii. 16. § Zech. xii. 10. || Matt. xx. 19.

we ought to be filled with admiration of his grace, with gratitude, love, and zeal. To behold such a sight even with indifference betrays a lamentable stupor of the mind, and an alienation of the soul from the life of God. A proper view of the Saviour "suffering for sins, the just for the unjust," will command our attention, and inspire us with all holy affections. If we understand the nature and value of the object here proposed, the whole world, with all its boasted enjoyments, will appear little in our estimation. We shall determine to know nothing, and glory in nothing, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified \*. We shall perceive sin to be "exceeding sinful," re-solve that "our old man," and all his corrupt members, shall be mortified with Christ, and dread the thought of "crucifying the Son of God afresh, and putting him to an open shame." The cross, when apprehended by faith, will appear to contain a complete remedy for the necessities of our guilty souls; and while, through this expedient, we approach to God with confidence and joy, we shall burn with eager desire that the blessed mystery may be proclaimed throughout the earth, and sinners of every description persuaded "to confess the faith of Christ crucified †." We shall feel our obligations more forcibly than words can express, and our constant inquiry will be, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits 1?"

Has the subject produced in us such effects as these? It is allowed that even sincere and eminent believers are shamefully defective in love to the Redeemer. But, we fear, there are thousands among us, who have never been brought under the influence of this divine principle. "The preaching of the cross" is to some "a stumbling-block," and to others "foolishness §." Through ignorance, pride, and un-

<sup>\* 1</sup> Cor. ii. 2. Gal. vi. 14. † Office of Baptism. ‡ Psal. exvi. 12. § 1 Cor. i. 23.

belief, they presumptuously cavil at and deride it; but may we thankfully and joyfully receive it, as bringing the highest glory to God, no less than complete salvation to man! May it be made effectual to subdue in us all haughtiness of spirit, the love of sin and of the world! May it establish us in peace and confidence toward God, and give us the victory over death! Then, having gained an admission into heaven, we shall sing for ever, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by his own blood." Amen.

## JESUS CHRIST.

## SECT. 41.

Jesus, hanging on the cross, prayed for his murderers
—was reviled—comforted the penitent thief—complained of desertion—expired—was pierced—taken down and buried.

THE glory of the Saviour broke forth at various times throughout his humiliation, to the astonishment of many beholders. Even at the last, his dignity, when most obscured, was illustriously displayed. There were certain circumstances attending his deepest abasement, which in a peculiar manner command our reverence, and conciliate our esteem. While these are proposed to our serious contemplation, we shall look beyond the meanness of his appearance, and, perceiving the real excellency of his character, we shall be constrained to admire, love, and praise him.

We have already accompanied our Lord to Calvary, where his sacred body was stretched out with extreme anguish, pierced in its tenderest parts, fastened to the wood, and exhibited as a spectacle of infamy and contempt to all the people. We now return to the painful, though most instructive, sight, and follow him in our meditations from the cross to the grave. May we be made conformable to him in his sufferings, and "our old man be crucified with him, that the body of sin may be destroyed \*!" As "by thy cross and passion," so "by thy precious death and burial, good Lord, deliver us †!"

If we advert to the circumstances of his cruci-\* Rom. vi. 6. + Litany.

fixion, what do we behold in the conduct of his enemies but insatiable rage and cruelty? What do we see in him but unexampled meekness, patience, and compassion? He offered no resistance to their violence, but calmly resigned himself, "as a lamb to the slaughter \*." He was solicitous for the salvation of his murderers, rather than for his own personal ease and deliverance. While he commended them to the divine mercy, he manifested the riches of his grace. Even in his dying moments "he made intercession for the transgressors †." He said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do !."

forgive them, for they know not what they do ‡."
What an eminent pattern is this! He not only taught, but practised, gentleness, forbearance, and love, to the most malicious persecutors: he poured out his heart in fervent supplication for them. He had frequently discovered the same disposition on former occasions; but no instance can be compared to this. After the vilest indignities put upon him, at the very time when his bloodthirsty enemies were exerting the utmost efforts of their rage, and he was bleeding under their hands, he pitied their blindness; for they understood not the sinfulness and danger of their conduct: he grieved for their miserable state, and prayed that they might not come into final condemnation. How few even attempt to imitate the bright example! It must, however, be allowed, that the proud, the implacable, and revengeful, who constitute a numerous company, bear no resemblance to Jesus.

Here the Redeemer has afforded us a representation of his gracious intercession in behalf of sinners: as Mediator between God and man, he is continually offering up a similar petition in heaven. There may be those, who show the most decided and contemptuous opposition both to him and his people, for whom he pleads the merit of his blood as an adequate atone-

<sup>\*</sup> Isa. liii. 7. + 12. ± Luke xxiii. 34.

ment, and may still be considered as speaking to the same effect, "Father, forgive them, for they know

not what they do."

The soldiers who nailed him to the cross, having stripped him of his garments, divided them among themselves\*; yet, even in that division, their minds were so overruled by a divine influence, that they fulfilled an express prophecy, and gave further evidence that Jesus was indeed the Christ. For thus had Messiah spoken by David his progenitor, "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture t." After this they continued to watch him, that none might attempt a rescue.

Probably with the view of exposing him to ridicule, an inscription, in the three languages generally used and understood, was fixed over his head, deriding his claims of majesty: "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." The chief priests, indeed, were disgusted that they should be represented as the subjects of so contemptible a King, and petitioned that the writing might be altered. But Pilate refused to comply with their wishes; and that very title, intended to reproach the Saviour, was so ordered, under the divine direction, as to express the honourable character and office which he sustains for the benefit of the true Israel.

Was not the rage of the people at length satiated? Were no tokens of compassion shown to the holy Sufferer? No: quite the contrary. All ranks seemed to unite and vie with each other, while they insulted him by the most scornful and opprobrious speeches. The mob surrounded and reviled him. Even those who were passing on the road stopped to amuse themselves with his misery; ridiculed the absurdity of his pretending to be the Son of God, and to rebuild the temple; and with virulent abuse called

<sup>\*</sup> Matt. xxvii. 35-44. Mark xv. 24-32. Luke xxiii. 34-43. John xix. 19-24. + Psalm xxii. 18.

upon him to make good his claims, by escaping out of the hands of justice. But shall we wonder at the foolish sneers of a thoughtless multitude, when their superiors set the example? In this case, persons of authority, and of the sacred function, led the way, and "were chief in the trespass." They laid aside their dignity, and mixed in the tumultuous crowd, that they might promote the general outcry against the Saviour, and deride his helpless situation. As it had been alleged that he had saved so many others by miracles, they now, in a disdainful manner, required him to save himself, and promised that they would believe him to be the Christ of God, if he would prove his divine power by coming down from the cross.

How weak, as well as wicked, were these speeches! To have rescued himself would have been inconsistent with the great design of his incarnation. We rejoice, that, in order to accomplish salvation for others, he would not accept deliverance. It would have been easy for him, by one single exertion, to have obtained his release; nor would this have exceeded, in strength of evidence, many of those works which he had performed in their presence. Had their presumptuous demands been granted, such were the pride and obstinacy of their hearts, there had still been no hope that they would have acknowledged him in his proper character. Men are deceived when they suppose that some striking appearance or interposition, as an additional proof of revelation, would remove their unbelief. They, who arrogantly reject what is offered, would not be convinced by any demonstration whatever.

The soldiers, also, joined in the same blasphemous reproaches, calling on the Redeemer to assert his pretended royalty by escaping out of their hands, which they foolishly thought impossible. Thus that prophetic declaration was remarkably accomplished;

"All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him \*." How astonishing, that, in their profane sneers, they applied the very words, and in the exact sense, which

had been predicted!

Two atrocious malefactors were crucified with Jesus: He was placed between them, that he might lie under the greater odium, being exhibited to the public view as a person of the same description. But this circumstance fulfilled the Scripture, which said, "He was numbered with the transgressors t." No reproaches, it should seem, were cast upon them; so that he was accounted the vilest of the three. One, at least, of the thieves themselves, joined in the general ridicule, and, while dying in his sins, strove to forget his own misery, that he might insult and deride the Saviour. A state of more confirmed and obdurate wickedness is scarcely to be conceived.

But though, in this criminal, we lament the extreme degeneracy of our nature, we are called to admire the sovereignty, freeness, and efficacy of divine grace, in the pardon and conversion of his fellow-sufferer. An astonishing, and, as it should seem, a sudden change, was produced in the man, who appeared equally deprayed, and equally near to the brink of destruction. At the latest moment he obtained an assurance of his acceptance and salvation. Possibly he had never felt real impressions of religion before that awful season, or offered a sincere prayer to God. It is certain, at least, that he was expiring by the hand of justice for his iniquities, and could not plead any previous goodness of his own. But at this hour his heart was softened and renewed: he repented, believed, and received the full forgiveness of his sins. Thus one was taken, and another left. Who shall

<sup>\*</sup> Psal. xxii. 7, 8. + Isa. liii. 12.

presume to find fault? For who has any claim upon God? or who shall dare to say, that He may not extend his pardoning mercy to what objects, and in

what circumstances, He pleases?

Many attempts have been made to obscure the glory of divine grace in the conversion of the dying thief; as if the example were of a dangerous tendency. But, if we attend to it with godly simplicity, we shall find it replete with instruction. It is a striking exhibition of the character of the Saviour, and of the triumph of his cross. It confirms and illustrates the peculiar doctrine of the Gospel, that men are justified in the sight of God, not by their own obedience, but freely through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. The case is recorded for the encouragement of those "who are ready to perish," and stands as an incontestable proof that none need despair of acceptance who look unto Jesus, even though life itself be drawing to a close. If any will abuse it, this must be to themselves; and doubtless by such a conduct they will aggravate their guilt and condemnation.

The penitence and faith of this malefactor were conspicuous. The grace of God changed and sanctified his heart, while the blood of Christ, then streaming from the cross, expiated all his guilt. He reproved his fellow-criminal for his daring contempt of the Saviour, and warned him to consider his danger: he frankly confessed his own iniquity, and the justice of that sentence by which he suffered: he vindicated the character of Jesus, when there were none to plead his cause: he believed on him for pardon and salvation, in that lowest degree of abasement: he prayed to him as the Lord of life, who was about to take his seat on the throne of glory, and who had heaven itself at his disposal: he said, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom!" Good evidence, then, was given of his dying convert's

sincerity; and, though his religion was of a sudden growth, it was solid and vigorous; and, had he been spared, doubtless the most excellent fruits would have been seen in his future obedience. Our gracious Lord listened to his cry, immediately testified his own favourable acceptance, and assured him that he should be with him, that very day, in an exalted

state of purity and happiness.

How rich and extensive is the mercy of our God in Christ! The case before us will furnish us with a strong argument against despair: but let it not be abused for the purposes of vain confidence and presumption. Though one of these malefactors was, indeed, "a brand plucked out of the fire "," yet it should be remembered that the other, who appeared equally within reach of salvation, perished for ever. O, fear, lest, while Jesus comes nigh to you in the ministry of his word, and many experience its inestimable benefit, you yourselves should be destroyed in unbelief!

The cross was surrounded by an insulting multitude: but there were, also, some friends, and certain pious women, especially, who stood near our Lord †. These attracted his notice in the midst of his sufferings, and, as he remarked among them his dear mother, he now paid to her the last tribute of filial duty and affection. Not having worldly possessions to leave, he committed her to the care and protection of John, his beloved disciple, who was likewise present. How tender the address to her, "Woman, behold thy son!" How honourable the charge to him, "Behold thy mother!"

Whilst Jesus remained on the cross, in a state of extreme torture, a miraculous darkness commenced, about mid-day, which continued for three hours, and extended over the whole land. Such an event must

<sup>\*</sup> Zech. iii. 2. + Matt. xxvii. 45, &c. Matk xv. 23, &c. Luke xxiii. 44, &c. John xix. 25, &c.

have produced a general consternation; and it was descriptive of the inexpressible horror which almost overwhelmed the Son of God. How astonishing, on that occasion, the complaint of the holy Sufferer! The agony of his mind, it should seem, exceeded the sharpest pains which he felt from the piercing of his body. The light of his Father's countenance being withdrawn, he lost all inward consolation, and was oppressed, even as in Gethsemane, with anguish and terror beyond conception. In consequence of this he uttered that loud and bitter cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Yet, strange as the exclamation was, we know it was expressly predicted \*.

It were absurd to ascribe this effect to any groundless apprehensions, weakness, or timidity of spirit, or to seek for any other cause than the office which Jesus then sustained as our High-Priest, making atonement for our transgressions. We behold, therefore, the deep malignity of sin, in the desertion here spoken of, as well as in every other part of his passion. How great his distress was we pretend not to calculate. Those who lie down in absolute despair, or the miserable souls who are shut up in a state of darkness and horror for ever, can best tell what it is to be forsaken of God. But, since we all are exposed to the attacks of Satan, and may at any moment be filled with anguish and dismay, under a sense of the divine displeasure, it will be proper to pray that the great God may not thus leave us to be terrified and confounded, especially at the solemn season of our departure. How suitable is that petition in our Burial Service, "Spare us, Lord most holy, O God most mighty, O holy and merciful Saviour, thou most worthy Judge eternal, suffer us not at our last hour for any pains of death to fall from thee!"

Did not the expressions of our Lord's distress

<sup>\*</sup> Peal vvii. 1.

move the compassion of his enemies? No: they turned his lamentation into ridicule; as if, when he cried "Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani," he had been calling for Elijah. It was therefore proposed, with a contemptuous sneer, that he might wait for that Prophet to deliver him. Such were the blindness

and obduracy of their hearts!

One more prophecy remained to be fulfilled; and, with a view to its completion, Jesus exclaimed, "I thirst." Let us hear what the Psalmist wrote of the distress and anguish of his Lord and Antitype, and mark the circumstantial prediction, in which he described a method of insult, and a practice of cruelty, unusual and unheard of. "My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death." "They gave me gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink \*." The Gospel narrative proves that this was exactly fulfilled in the history of the Saviour. When he complained of the burning feverish heat, with which he was parched through the excess of his anguish, no refreshing draught was offered him, to assuage his pain; but the nauseous potion which had been foretold was administered. He was denied the common succour, which is never refused to an enemy in distress: though racked with torture, he was treated with every species of insult.

We hasten to the close of his sufferings, and proceed to consider the manner in which he expired. Death was not the necessary consequence of crucifixion. He might have come down from the cross, or even retained his life there. No strength or violence of his enemies could have prevailed against his own choice. "No man," said he, "taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again the constant of the constant of

<sup>\*</sup> Psal. xxii. 15. lxix. 1. + John x. 18.

it had been appointed and declared from the beginning that Messiah should redeem the church by the sacrifice of himself. The typical oblations, as well as various prophecies, had given intimations that "without shedding of blood is no remission \*." Jesus, therefore, assumed our nature for this end, that he might die, and "bear our sins in his own body on the tree+."

Anxiously attentive to the completion of the sacred oracles, in all things pertaining to himself, he would not be released from that state of anguish till he knew that every tittle was fulfilled: and thus he has laid a sure foundation for our hope and comfort. This object being attained, he cried, as if exulting in the great work he had accomplished, "It is finished;" "all the important purposes of my incarnation are now answered; the glory of God and the salvation of my people are secured; and here I close my suf-

ferings."

His strength was not even then exhausted: his voice, in his last departing words, was as one in full tone and vigour. That he might teach us to leave the world, maintaining faith and joy in God, he said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my Spirit"—"I intrust it to thy care, in cheerful dependence on thy truth and love, and in confident expectation of its reunion with the body." Having thus spoken, he bowed his head, and surrendered the life which he had the power of retaining. Such a power, indeed, we do not possess. Our breath will be taken from us; whereas, he resigned up his. In the act of quitting his abode on earth, as well as during the whole of his continuance here, he yielded a pure and unconstrained obedience to God.

What a momentous event was this! Such as had never before occurred. The Lord God, therefore, that he might glorify his Son Jesus, rendered his de-

<sup>\*</sup> Heb. ix. 22. + 1 Pet. ii. 24.

parture memorable by a train of miracles, and, as it were, arrested the attention of a careless world. All nature appeared in consternation when the Lord of nature died. The sun withdrew his light, and thus afforded an emblem that the grand Luminary of mankind was removed. The vail of the temple, or the sacred curtain which separated the holy of holies, and forbad the access of common worshippers, was instantly torn asunder, intimating that the Mosaic dispensation was abolished, that heaven itself was opened, and liberty obtained to approach into the immediate presence of God. The earth shook by a violent convulsion, and the massy rocks were cleft by a supernatural force; and were not these prodigies suited to excite an alarm on account of the atrocious deed which had been perpetrated? The neighbouring sepulchres, also, suddenly disclosed their gloomy mansions to the public view: from the graves, then opened, the bodies of many departed saints arose, after the resurrection of Jesus, and appeared in Jerusalem. In such a signal manner it was proclaimed that our crucified Lord had vanquished death, and ransomed his people from the power of the grave.

Notwithstanding these surprising miracles, many remained thoughtless and obdurate. But there were others of the spectators, whose minds were deeply impressed with grief and terror. The centurion, especially, who attended with his band of soldiers to guard the execution, felt and acknowledged a strong conviction that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. Ah! why does not that conviction force itself upon us all? And why does not this astonishing narration

produce in us better and more lasting effects?

The reality of the death of Christ, on which our hopes are grounded, was proved indisputably by his enemies. The Jews from their pretended regard to the sabbath, which was then approaching, requested

of Pilate that the bodies hanging on the cross might be removed, and that their legs might be broken, for the purpose of despatching them the sooner. But, Jesus having already expired, that act of violence was not committed upon him. Thus the divine wisdom had appointed, according to the typical representation of the paschal lamb, that a bone of him should not be broken\*.

The important fact was further evinced by the brutal rage of one of the soldiers, who struck a spear into his side, and pierced him to the very heart. Had life remained, that wound must have been mortal; for immediately there issued out blood and water, which flowed from the vital parts. This circumstance, on which the Evangelist strongly insists, was not only a proof of the Saviour's death, but an emblem of the blessings which we derive from that event. He "came by water and blood+;" the water denoting the purifying grace of his Spirit, and the blood the expiation of our guilt. The two must be united, "not water only, but water and blood;" and both are communicated from the crucified Redeemer. You, who perceive your defilement, behold with gratitude and joy the remedy provided. See that stream which proceeds from the pierced side of Jesus, and pray that you may experience its full effi-cacy. It is "the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness 1."

Jesus, then, is "set forth to be a propitation, through faith in his blood \( \);" and by this expedient God determined to display his own righteous character, and vindicate the honour of his government. Now it appears that he is "just," and yet "the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus ||." The atonement here exhibited furnishes the awakened penitent with such a plea as may encourage him to approach to God with confidence and joy \( \). At the same time

<sup>•</sup> Exod. xii, 46. † 1 John v. 6. ‡ Zech, xiii, 11. § Rom. iii, 25.

it will subdue in his heart the love and power of sin, and teach him to live in all holy obedience\*. The cross of Christ, therefore, produces the most blessed consequences, and constitutes the very essence of our religion. Whoever may oppose or deride, it must be continually held up to view; and those who understand its worth, and feel its efficacy, will always contemplate the object with wonder, love, and praise. To them it will ever appear as "the power of God, and the wisdom of God†." It will impress their minds with a sense of their high obligations, and excite them to active exertions in the service of God. They will say, with the Apostle, "We thus judge, that, if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them \(\frac{1}{2}\)."

The sequel of the history directs our attention to the lifeless body of our Redeemer. He had been delivered to the Romans to be crucified, and according to their custom, probably, would not have been interred. But how then would the Scriptures have been fulfilled? For our Lord himself had predicted, that, by his sepulture "in the heart of the earth," he should exactly correspond to the type exhibited in Jonas §. The same thing, also, was implied in that declaration of Messiah by the royal Psalmist, "My flesh shall rest in hope || "Now, the Jews were the means of giving this additional evidence to the character of Jesus, by petitioning for his burial. Yet, in order to complete a particular prophecy, another difficulty was to be removed. For, if buried at all, why should he not lie with the two thieves, in the place appropriated to the interment of malefactors? This, it should seem, was designed. But Isaiah had foretold, that, though "his grave was ap-

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<sup>\*</sup> Col. i. 21, 22. + 1 Cor. i. 24. + 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. § Matt. xii. 40. || Psal. xvi. 9.

pointed with the wicked, with the rich man should be his tomb \*."

Here then we perceive and admire the sovereign providence of God, accomplishing his own purposes. A person of opulence, rank, and reputation, Joseph of Arimathea, was not afraid or ashamed to appear as an advocate for Jesus in that state of greatest infamy, though he never before had the courage to avow the attachment which he felt. He requested of Pilate, that the body might be left to his care; which being granted, he took it down from the cross, and bound it up in clean linen. Nicodemus, also, of the same honourable situation in life, and of a si-milar disposition, having prepared spices and ointments for embalming the corpse, came and assisted in the pious work. These two, therefore, with all suitable respect and solemnity, committed Jesus to a tomb, which was Joseph's property, a perfectly new sepulchre, hewn out of the rock, and not far from the place of crucifixion. Thus "He, who was too poor to provide a sepulchre for himself, was honourably interred at the expense of the rich+." They probably understood not the importance of this action, to which they were led by a divine influence: but we should adore that wisdom, which overrules all events, and brings to pass the most unlikely things for the completion of the Scriptures.

The entrance into the cave where Jesus lay was secured by a large massy stone. The women who attended him at the cross followed him with weeping eyes to the grave, and took particular notice of the place and manner of his burial. All these circumstances occurred on the Friday. The next day was the sabbath, or the season of holy rest: but, even then, the adversaries of Jesus ceased not from their malicious exertions. Not yet convinced by the mi-

<sup>\*</sup> Isa. liii. 9. Bishop Lowth's translation. † Bishop Chandler's Defence of Christianity. See also Bishop Pearson on the Creed.

racles they had seen, nor satisfied with what their rage had inflicted, the Jewish leaders went to Pilate, and, having reproached the Saviour as a base impostor, desired that the sepulchre might be properly secured. They alleged that peculiar care was requisite till the third day, lest his disciples should steal the body, and assert that he had risen from the dead, according to his prediction. Their request was granted; and therefore, to prevent any such fraud as they suspected, they sealed up the door of the cave, and

placed a guard upon the spot.

How malignant the tempers of these opposers of Christ, who pursued him with their virulent reproaches even to the grave! Alas! what vile affections mark and disgrace the degenerate nature of man! Their invidious precautions, however, tended to his glory and their confusion; for it appeared from their testimony, that Jesus had expressly foretold his own resurrection: and they took the most effectual method to prove indisputably not only that he was dead and buried, but also that "he rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures\*." Thus will the subtle devices and malicious efforts of our enemies concur to promote "the furtherance of the Gospel." The faithful servants of Christ have no reason to dread "what man can do against them."

While we accompany Jesus to the grave, let us reflect on our own approaching dissolution, and the gloomy habitation to which our breathless bodies will be consigned. We must be committed to the ground; but how unlike to Jesus, who "saw no corruption!" We must turn "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust +." Yet, if believers, we may smile under this expectation. The burial of Jesus will reconcile us to our own, and teach us to think of it with delight. We should desire to be conformed to our exalted

<sup>\* 1</sup> Cor. xv. 3, 4. + Burial Service.

Head; and we may conclude that our flesh, also, shall "rest in hope."

But this is an unpleasant and offensive subject to you, whose attention is fixed on present things and sensual enjoyments. Yet we entreat you to consider what will become of those delicate bodies, which you adorn and pamper with so much care and expense. Think where your pride and luxury must end, blooming and vigorous as you may now be. Pray, that, "by continually mortifying your corrupt affections, you may be buried with Christ \*;" and then you may rejoice in confidence, that, "though after your skin worms destroy this body, yet in your flesh you shall see God, whom you shall see for yourself, and your eyes shall behold, and not another t."

\* Collect for Easter Even.

+ Job xix, 26, 27.

END OF VOL. IV.









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